

LOVAT DICKSON'S MAGAZINE

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EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

A word about short story magazines

I AM tempted to look backward over twenty years of short story reading and to contrast the English and American short story of twenty years ago with the English and American short story to-day. I suppose that twenty years is a literary generation. Well, the past twenty years have seen more changes than the previous century. In 1913 a magazine devoted entirely to the short story as a form of art would have been impossible. In 1933 such a magazine comes to us as a longfelt want at last fulfilled. Twenty years ago the serious short story had no public. To-day such a public is clamouring for it, and it is interesting to discover why.

Twenty years ago the serious short story was the Cinderella of the arts in both England and America. In England, such stories were written, but the magazines were seldom open to them. In America, such stories were not even written. An earlier generation had known of them, but the mushroom growth of popular magazines had destroyed them. In 1913 every one was writing short stories in America, from the schoolmistress to the plumber, but they were writing stories which "would sell." Stories which "would sell" were turned out by mass production from accepted stencils just as

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they are turned out now. These stories were tawdry and ephemeral and, because they lacked spiritual vitality, were never collected by their authors in book form. There was no public for a collection of short stories.

When I began to collect the best American short stories which I could find in 1914, I was undertaking a task far more difficult than I had realised. Out of perhaps eight thousand short stories published in America in a year, I could not find more than twenty-five worth publication, and even these twenty-five stories were for the most part written by writers of competent honest talent rather than of definite originality. I have nearly finished reading the American short stories of 1933, and the contrast is astonishing. This year I could name twenty-five or more new writers who have appeared for the first time during the past twelve months, and each of these writers is original and significant. Yet my reading perforce covered a much narrower field than in 1914, for in the past two or three years American magazines have been decimated by the financial crash, and not more than four thousand stories or so have come into the field of my examination.

So much for the change in American short story writing. How are we to account for it? It is entirely due to the so-called "little magazines." The popular fiction magazines were closed to the serious writer, and the writer had to establish his own magazines. The editors had abdicated, and the short story writer was obliged to educate his own public. Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway, for example, made their own road to a public through specialised little magazines. The history of one of these periodicals is instructive.

In the spring of 1931, two American newspaper correspondents in Vienna, Whit Burnett and Martha Foley, read

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some words of mine praising a tiny stencilled magazine called *The Gyroscope*, in which four distinguished new American writers had published their short stories. I suggested that other groups of writers might do well to follow their inexpensive example. Whit Burnett and Martha Foley set to work gathering material and the first issue of a magazine called *Story* appeared in April 1931, in an edition of eighty copies. That issue is now a collector's item worth four or five guineas. *Story* appeared regularly every two months on time, and by the spring of this year it had achieved a circulation of six hundred copies. When Whit Burnett and Martha Foley lost their positions in Vienna, they moved to Majorca and printed the magazine on a seventeenth-century hand-press. They had exhausted their small savings a year ago when word came to them from New York that an American publisher had faith in them. Would they bring *Story* to America? They did. The first American issue came out last March on the first day of the moratorium. Before the moratorium was over, the issue was exhausted on the news stands. Eight months later, *Story* can boast a circulation of fifteen thousand copies. This achievement is the more significant because during the past two years the older established American periodicals have seen their circulation very nearly halved. The success of *Story* is entirely due to the fact that it has published more significant short stories during the year than all the established American magazines put together. Furthermore, *Story* has brought about a revival of interest in the American short story among publishers. Three of the most successful books of short stories published in America this year are by *Story* authors: Erskine Caldwell, George Milburn, and José García Villa. Three or four years ago, not one of these books would have found an American publisher.

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Now the success of *Story* is not a literary accident. It is the result of an editorial policy. That policy may be stated simply and clearly in a very few words. It was to print, regardless of name or reputation, the best short stories the editors could find without considering for a moment what the public was supposed to want. The average editor regards the public as feeble-minded. He believes that it must be spoon-fed. Whit Burnett and Martha Foley believed that the public was intelligent. They had a healthy distaste for cliques, coteries, and artiness. Otherwise their taste was catholic. They judged the quality of a story by its success in achieving the aim of the author. If the story achieved that aim successfully, they printed the story even if they disliked that aim. A story by a well-known writer had no better chance than a story by a new writer, but it had as good a chance. On the other hand, the old-fashioned competent "well-made" story had no chance. The experimental story by the ardent young modernist did not interest them unless his experiment succeeded. The beautifully written story about nothing written by an æsthete to amuse his friends found no welcome in *Story*. The little Lawrences and the little Hemingways were also disregarded. *Story* was an act of faith in art and human nature, and it was open to any artist who subscribed to that faith. It has pointed the way to the future of the American short story, and its history points the way to the future of the English short story.

Let us see how the challenge of *Story* may be taken up in England. The conditions are but little different, and such difference as there is to be found is in England's favour. There are fewer popular short story magazines in England than a few years ago. For the most part, they do not publish significant original short stories. The number of those which do has shrunk alarmingly in the past two or three years.

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On the other hand, nothing is more marked than the revival of interest in the serious short story. My annual bibliographies of short story books of distinction are longer each year. One very conservative English publisher has issued a dozen distinguished volumes of short stories in 1933 alone. As contrasted with the American interest in the subject, the English interest is much more direct, centralised, and consolidated. The new writer, if he publishes one good short story in England, has already won interest. England was talking about Arthur Calder-Marshall's story *Rosie* a fortnight after it appeared in *Life and Letters*. That would not have been possible in America. All that is necessary to focus public interest in the English short story is a magazine sufficiently alert, catholic, and tolerant to print the best, wherever it is to be found. Such a magazine, allowing a free play of intelligence, indulgent to successful experiment, discouraging to artiness, welcoming new excellence wherever it is to be found, willing to believe that the clever young man just down from Oxford or Cambridge may be able to reflect life but must offer better credentials than the fact that he has been at the right public school and has engaged in college journalism, fearing no novelty and equally willing to carry on the English tradition without despising it as *vieux jeu*, ceaselessly curious but equally matter-of-fact, recognising that art often masquerades in strange shapes, but also sits at the fire as an unrecognised familiar guest—such a magazine, I repeat, can do for England what *Story* has done for America.

Lovat Dickson's Magazine is such an experiment. Every successful experiment is an act of faith. Fortunately for England, an act of faith in the contemporary English short story is not difficult. We may measure its future by its present achievement. I have only one suggestion to make from experience. London literary circles are very largely

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drawn from the universities. Their social life moves in tolerably narrow circles. Their contact with life is much more restricted than in America. I have seen too many unpublished manuscript stories by English writers who are "not known" not to realise that a more open forum is necessary for the unknown writer than any English magazine offers. The case of D. H. Lawrence is not utterly beside the point. Lawrence had better fortune than most men in his case. He found more than one editor with courage to print him when he was an unknown man. But there are many good English writers in Lawrence's case whom a social awkwardness and an unfamiliarity with the right set at Oxford or Cambridge prevent from finding public utterance for their experience. They also are England and they must be found. *Story* has found them month after month in America. It is the good fortune of *Lovat Dickson's Magazine*, which it will be quick to recognise, that it can find them here. Literature in the Elizabethan age was not class-conscious. I suspect that an era of change is upon us which will have more than Elizabethan implications. Now that such a day seems near, let us hope that it will not find our writers class-conscious now, wherever fortune has placed them or displaced them.



ERNEST HEMINGWAY

After the storm

IT wasn't about anything, something about making punch, and then we started fighting and I slipped and he had me down kneeling on my chest and choking me with both hands like he was trying to kill me and all the time I was trying to get the knife out of my pocket to 'cut him loose. Everybody was too drunk to pull him off me. He was choking me and hammering my head on the floor and I got the knife out and opened it up ; and I cut the muscle right across his arm and he let go of me. He couldn't have held on if he wanted to. Then he rolled and hung onto that arm and started to cry and I said :

“ What the hell you want to choke me for ? ”

I'd have killed him. I couldn't swallow for a week. He hurt my throat bad.

Well, I went out of there and there were plenty of them with him and some come out after me and I made a turn and was down by the docks and I met a fellow and he said somebody killed a man up the street. I said “ Who killed him ? ” and he said “ I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right,” and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown

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and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside of Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water. So I bailed her out and pumped her out and there was a moon but plenty of clouds and still plenty rough and I took it down along ; and when it was daylight I was off Eastern Harbor.

Brother, that was some storm. I was the first boat out and you never saw water like that was. It was just as white as a lye barrel and coming from Eastern Harbor to Sou'west Key you couldn't recognize the shore. There was a big channel blown right out through the middle of the beach. Trees and all blown out and a channel cut through and all the water white as chalk and everything on it ; branches and whole trees and dead birds, and all floating. Inside the keys were all the pelicans in the world and all kinds of birds flying. They must have gone inside there when they knew it was coming.

I lay at Sou'west Key a day and nobody came after me. I was the first boat out and I seen a spar floating, and I knew there must be a wreck and I started out to look for her. I found her. She was a three-masted schooner and I could just see the stumps of her spars out of water. She was in too deep water and I didn't get anything off of her. So I went on looking for something else. I had the start on all of them and I knew I ought to get whatever there was. I went on down over the sand-bars from where I left that three-masted schooner and I didn't find anything and I went on a long way. I was way out toward the quicksands and I didn't find anything so I went on. Then when I was in sight of the Rebecca Light I saw all kinds of birds making over something and I headed over for them to see what it was and there was a cloud of birds all right.

I could see something looked like a spar up out of water

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and when I got over close the birds all went up in the air and stayed all around me. The water was clear out there and there was a spar of some kind sticking out just above the water and when I come up close to it I saw it was all dark under water like a long shadow and I came right over it and there under water was a liner ; just lying there all under water as big as the whole world. I drifted over her in the boat. She lay on her side and the stern was deep down. The port holes were all shut tight and I could see the glass shine in the water and the whole of her ; the biggest boat I ever saw in my life laying there and I went along the whole length of her and then I went over and anchored and I had the skiff on the deck forward and I shoved it down into the water and sculled over with the birds all around me.

I had a water glass like we use sponging and my hand shook so I could hardly hold it. All the port holes were shut that you could see going along over her but way down below near the bottom something must have been open because there were pieces of things floating out all the time. You couldn't tell what they were. Just pieces. That's what the birds were after. You never saw so many birds. They were all around me ; crazy yelling.

I could see everything sharp and clear. I could see her rounded over and she looked a mile long under the water. She was lying on a clear white bank of sand and the spar was a sort of foremast or some sort of tackle that slanted out of water the way she was laying on her side. Her bow wasn't very far under. I could stand on the letters of her name on her bow and my head was just out of water. But the nearest port hole was twelve feet down. I could just reach it with the grains pole and I tried to break it with that but I couldn't. The glass was too stout. So I sculled back to the boat and got a wrench and lashed it to the end of

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the grains pole and I couldn't break it. There I was looking down through the glass at that liner with everything in her and I was the first one to her and I couldn't get into her. She must have had five million dollars worth in her.

It made me shaky to think how much she must have in her. Inside the port hole that was closest I could see something but I couldn't make it out through the water glass. I couldn't do any good with the grains pole and I took off my clothes and stood and took a couple of deep breaths and dove over off the stern with the wrench in my hand and swam down. I could hold on for a second to the edge of the port hole and I could see in and there was a woman inside with her hair floating all out. I could see her floating plain and I hit the glass twice with the wrench hard and I heard the noise clink in my ears but it wouldn't break and I had to come up.

I hung onto the dinghy and got my breath and then I climbed in and took a couple of breaths and dove again. I swam down and took hold of the edge of the port hole with my fingers and held it and hit the glass as hard as I could with the wrench. I could see the woman floated in the water through the glass. Her hair was tied once close to her head and it floated all out in the water. I could see the rings on one of her hands. She was right up close to the port hole and I hit the glass twice and I didn't even crack it. When I came up I thought I wouldn't make it to the top before I'd have to breathe.

I went down once more and I cracked the glass, only cracked it, and when I came up my nose was bleeding and I stood on the bow of the liner with my bare feet on the letters of her name and my head just out and rested there and then I swam over to the skiff and pulled up into it and sat there waiting for my head to stop aching and looking down into

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the water glass, but I bled so I had to wash out the water glass. Then I lay back in the skiff and held my hand under my nose to stop it and I lay there with my head back looking up and there was a million birds above and all around.

When I quit bleeding I took another look through the glass and then I sculled over to the boat to try and find something heavier than the wrench but I couldn't find a thing ; not even a sponge hook. I went back and the water was clearer all the time and you could see everything that floated out over that white bank of sand. I looked for sharks but there weren't any. You could have seen a shark a long way away. The water was so clear and the sand white. There was a grapple for an anchor on the skiff and I cut it off and went overboard and down with it. It carried me right down and past the port hole and I grabbed and couldn't hold anything and went on down and down, sliding along the curved side of her. I had to let go of the grapple. I heard it bump once and it seemed like a year before I came up through to the top of the water. The skiff was floated away with the tide and I swam over to her with my nose bleeding in the water while I swam and I was plenty glad there weren't sharks ; but I was tired.

My head felt cracked open and I lay in the skiff and rested and then I sculled back. It was getting along in the afternoon. I went down once more with the wrench and it didn't do any good. That wrench was too light. It wasn't any good diving unless you had a big hammer or something heavy enough to do good. Then I lashed the wrench to the grains pole again and I watched through the water glass and pounded on the glass and hammered until the wrench came off and I saw it in the glass, clear and sharp, go sliding down along her and then off and down to the quicksand and go in. Then I couldn't do a thing. The wrench was gone

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and I'd lost the grapple so I sculled back to the boat. I was too tired to get the skiff aboard and the sun was pretty low. The birds were all pulling out and leaving her and I headed for Sou-west Key towing the skiff and the birds going on ahead of me and behind me. I was plenty tired.

That night it came on to blow and it blew for a week. You couldn't get out to her. They come out from town and told me the fellow I'd had to cut was all right except for his arm and I went back to town and they put me under five hundred dollar bond. It came out alright because some of them, friends of mine, swore he was after me with an axe, but by the time we got back out to her the Greeks had blown her open and cleaned her out. They got the safe out with dynamite. Nobody ever knows how much they got. She carried gold and they got it all. They stripped her clean. I found her and I never got a nickel out of her.

It was a hell of a thing all right. They say she was just outside of Havana harbor when the hurricane hit and she couldn't get in or the owners wouldn't let the captain chance coming in ; they say he wanted to try ; so she had to go with it and in the dark they were running with it trying to go through the gulf between Rebecca and Tortugas when she struck on the quicksands. Maybe her rudder was carried away. Maybe they weren't even steering. But anyway they couldn't have known they were quicksands and when she struck the captain must have ordered them to open up the ballast tanks so she'd lay solid. But it was quicksand she'd hit and when they opened the tanks she went in stern first and then over on her beam ends. There were four hundred and fifty passengers and the crew on board of her and they must all have been aboard of her when I found her. They must have opened the tanks as soon as she struck and the minute she settled on it the quicksands took her down.

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Then her boilers must have burst and that must have been what made those pieces that came out. It was funny there weren't any sharks though. There wasn't a fish. I could have seen them on that clear white sand.

Plenty of fish now though; jewfish, the biggest kind. The biggest part of her's under the sand now but they live inside of her; the biggest kind of jewfish. They've got a buoy on her now. She's at the end of the quick-sand right at the edge of the gulf. She only missed going through by about a hundred yards. In the dark in the storm they just missed it; raining the way it was they couldn't have seen the *Rebecca*. Then they're not used to that sort of thing. They have a course and they tell me they set some sort of a compass and it steers itself. They probably didn't know where they were when they ran with that blow but they come close to making it. Maybe they'd lost the rudder though. Anyway there wasn't another thing for them to hit till they'd get to Mexico once they were in that gulf. Nobody could have been on deck in that rain. Everybody must have been below. They couldn't have lived on deck. There must have been some scenes inside all right because you know she settled fast. I saw that wrench go into the sand. The captain couldn't have known it was quicksand when she struck unless he knew these waters. He just knew it wasn't rock. He must have seen it all up in the bridge. He must have known what it was about when she settled. I wonder how fast she made it. They never found any bodies. Not a one. Nobody floating. They float a long way with life belts too. They must have took it inside. Well, the Greeks got it all. Everything. They must have come fast all right. They picked her clean. First there was the birds, then me, then the Greeks, and even the birds got more out of her than I did.

HELEN ASHTON

Red Leather Coat

I

DOCTOR SEROCOLD was driving his dilapidated old car quietly up White Sheet Hill one winter afternoon, in second gear, keeping close to the hedge on his own side of the road, when he looked into his driving mirror and saw the other car coming up behind him. It gained on him rapidly and he heard the furious hooting of a powerful horn, but he said to himself, "The fellow has no right to pass me here, just below the crest of the hill." He accelerated and put out his hand to signal the other car back, but it came on till it filled his mirror and then swung wide to overtake him. The road was narrow and fenced by chalky banks, topped with quickset hedges ; the two cars blocked it completely as they topped the ridge, side by side.

Immediately below, on the steep descent to Dead Maid's Cross, was a heap of road-metal, with an abandoned steam-roller and a road-menders' van, isolated by a couple of red lanterns and filling half the highway. Doctor Serocold jammed on his brakes ; the overtaking car, with a less prompt or less skilful driver, swerved into him, locked handles with his car and carried it broadside up the bank. He heard one bang and a diminishing series of jolts and crashes ; he was

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flung hard against the steering-wheel ; then the car tilted sideways and settled into the hedge. He found himself lying on his right side, against the door. He thought instantly, "Fire . . ." then realised, through the singing in his ears, that the engine had stopped. With some difficulty, for he was no longer so young as he had been, he scrambled out of the tilted car into the beech-hedge and down into the road. "You're the sort of fool who ought never to be trusted with a driving-licence," he said bitterly to the owner of the second car.

She was a singularly beautiful, determined, haggard young woman. He could not quite remember her name, but he had a distinct and appreciative recollection of her face ; this was not the first time that he had seen her dangerous blue eyes, or the slender brows above them, the nervous twist of her painted lips and the classic ripple of her black hair under its tiny cap. She was a lovely skeleton, very tall and thin, in the mode of which he, professionally, disapproved ; he liked to see a woman's bones and nerves better protected. She stood with her feet together, thrusting her hands into the pockets of a red leather coat and wrapping it round her ; she was a defiant, troubled, somehow rather desperate figure against the dun-coloured sweep of an enormous hill. "No need for you to get excited," she told him, biting her lip.

Doctor Serocold had a prejudice against women-drivers and he was about to express it when he found that the accident had shaken him more than he realised ; the young woman's face disappeared from view and he put up his hand to his head. There was a bitter taste in his mouth and his knees shook under him. It was the young woman's arm which steadied him down on to the frozen grass of the bank. Vaguely he heard her say, "Better have a drink, hadn't

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you?" and shook his head; he thought that she persisted, "Well, I shall," but she drifted away into a foggy background as he put his head in his hands. At some later stage he found her holding the top of a flask to his lips. He drank two or three mouthfuls of spirit and felt better for them; raising his head, he saw her tilt and finish the cup. "I wanted that," she said; and, shaking out the dregs, "I'm not such a road-sow as you imagine. I've never run into anyone before."

The doctor was not disposed to be friendly; he was too much annoyed by his predicament, for he was on his way to an urgent case. "I'm surprised to hear it," he said grimly.

She looked astonished and hurt; she said, "I suppose you've heard tales of my furious driving; but I assure you I've never had a smash yet." He retorted, unrelentingly, "I've never heard anything for or against your driving. You seem to be a public danger, but I've no notion who you are." This evidently surprised her; she thought it over and decided to accept it as the confusion of an injured man. "Susan Chalke"; she offered politely, but as if it excused and explained her, she added, "I know you by sight; you're Doctor Serocold."

Even then she puzzled him; it was only with an effort that he recalled her. "Yes, Lady Susan Chalke; she's the daughter of some Irish peer and she's married to that fat, irritable, vulgar stockbroker who took a lease of Carfax when Harry Catterick's mother died and he couldn't pay the death-duties. Carfax is out of my beat nowadays; these people called in Jevons, he's the kind of doctor to suit them. I've seen this woman before, though; I was certain I had. The whole house-party was at the point-to-point the other day, a lot of over-dressed, common men and noisy girls, the sort of people I hate. Jean Gordon showed me a portrait,

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too, in one of those absurd society papers, all smoothed over and touched-up, looking half-asleep, in a little white satin and a lot of pearls. And, he thought irresistibly, "she looks much more wide awake now." He surveyed the young woman, standing on the wintry road, with her feet in a puddle and a smear of dirt on her cheek. She was staring at the fantastic juxtaposition of the two cars ; abruptly she stated, "Mine might move."

II

Her saloon was half-way up the bank, but still had its hind wheels in the road ; his dilapidated two-seater was obviously immovable, stuck in the hedge with all four wheels off the ground and supported by the other car below it. He thought "I shall have to buy a new car with the insurance, I can't put that off any longer" ; he said, "You'll have mine down on top of you if you move. Better not try it."

She paid no attention to him ; she opened the door of the saloon and slipped inside, with an accustomed boy's movement which made him think, in passing, "I've never seen a longer leg." There was a fretful whine from the self-starter, a penetrating roar from the engine ; the whole car shuddered, lurched, heaved itself backwards with a clumsy, animal motion, disengaged itself with a grind and a scrape from the tottering mass above it, then shot safely back on to the road. The young woman sat there trying the engine ; its rising and falling note droned across the fields ; unexpectedly she switched on the headlights and the glare made darkness fall about them. Doctor Serocold saw her eyes glitter as she turned them upon him. "I can get on to Canley Junction all right," she said. "I'll send a car back from there for you."

He was vexed by her cool, careless look ; he objected,

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“ But I’ve got to get to Dead Maid’s Farm as quickly as I can. I’ve a serious case there.”

She said, “ Never heard of it.” When he told her that it was two miles up a turning from the cross-roads she gave a desperate glance at her wrist-watch under the scarlet leather sleeve and said, “ Four miles out of my way. I can’t do it. I shall have to send someone back here for you.”

She had actually put out her hand to the gear-lever, which was on Doctor Serocold’s side of the car, before his amazement and fury combined in the words, “ I’m damned if you shall.” He pinned down her wrist as he spoke ; he panted, “ I’m not going to be left here in the lurch. You’ve smashed up my car for no reason at all, except that you were in too much of a hurry to look where you were going. Now you’ll have to give up whatever you came out to do and take me to my case.” He took a deep breath to steady himself, for the last few minutes had shaken him ; then continued more quietly, but still controlling her hand, “ It won’t take you ten minutes, you know ; but I can’t walk there with my bag under an hour, and I’m not likely to get a lift from anyone else. This is a pretty lonely road, especially in the evenings.”

She glanced strangely about her, as if she hardly saw the juniper-dotted folds of the chalk country, the emptiest in the south of England. He had time to think, “ Seven miles from home, five from Canley, eight from her own home and not a house nearer than Dead Maid’s ; it couldn’t have happened in a worse place,” before she moistened her dry lips and said, in an unexpectedly weak and anguished voice, “ But I’ve got a train to catch.”

One part of his mind had time to receive an impression, based on a glint in her eye and a quiver of her bitten lip, “ There’s something queer about all this. Nobody gets quite so dramatic about losing an ordinary, everyday train.”

RED LEATHER COAT

The more practical, dominant part made him retort, “I don’t care if you miss it. I’ve got a child dying there of diphtheria ; I may have to do a tracheotomy. Don’t waste any more of my time.”

It was the tone which he had used, once or twice in his life, to quiet a maniacal patient ; it had its effect. The young woman did not look appeased, or repentant, or even as if she altogether understood him, but her eyes shifted and turned as an animal’s do when it is quelled by staring ; she moved in her seat and agreed sulkily, “Very well.” Doctor Serocold judged it safe to release her hand, climb the bank, disinter the emergency bag from the ruins of his car and rejoin her. As they started down the hill he said to himself, “I wonder where the devil she really was going.”

III

They turned to the right at Dead Maid’s Cross, an intersection of two minor roads in the empty heart of the downs, a meet of hounds, otherwise unfrequented. Dead Maid’s Farm lay at the head of a waterless valley, surrounded by a ring of beeches and its own pale chalk fields, on a slope between a dew-pond and a line of prehistoric earthworks, out of which the rabbits yearly scratched flint arrow-heads, potsherds and splintered human bones. It was a cold house, blown by every wind under heaven ; from its doorstep, on a clear day, you could see four counties and a glitter of the sea. The water-wheel above it was creaking and complaining in the evening air as the car stopped in the farmyard beside a pen of bleating sheep. Doctor Serocold had not spoken to his driver, nor she to him, since his direction at the cross-roads ; she switched off her engine and sat waiting as he lifted out his emergency bag. He was a little at a loss as

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he bent to the window of the car and thanked her formally for the lift.

"I'd better wait, hadn't I" said she unexpectedly ; and then, with less steadiness, "For a minute or two, I mean . . . in case you wanted to send some message back. I suppose," she concluded irritably, "this God-forsaken place hasn't got a telephone."

The doctor said, "No, nothing nearer than Crab-Tree Farm, a mile across the ridge. That's been the trouble. I was up here this morning ; but they had to send across to Crab-Tree this afternoon when the child got worse and I was out on a round and missed the message. That's why I was in such a hurry to get here." She only stared and he said, "If you could possibly wait ten minutes it might be of the greatest help."

She looked at her wrist-watch and shrugged her shoulders ; he thought that he had never seen a more miserable, inexpressive face. He did not know what was the matter with her ; and he could not wait to guess. "Better come in," he told her. She obeyed him sullenly ; he forgot her as soon as he was inside the door, he had other things to trouble him.

The farm-house was very old, small and neglected ; he had known its inhabitants all their lives. They were poor and shiftless, going fast downhill ; old Noel and his wife did little but lament past prosperity. Bob Noel, the eldest son, struggled in vain with falling prices, rising wages and his own incompetence ; he was supposed to have taken to drink since his wife left him. There was a litter of grandchildren, wild as rabbits ; the doctor did not pretend to know them apart, except that it was the youngest, the two-year old boy, who was ill. He was so familiar with the dark and crowded farm kitchen that he never spared a glance for the linen-fold panelling, the carved stone fireplace and the

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coat-of-arms above it, which drew the sophisticated eye of his companion. He shrugged off hat and coat in a hurry, demanding meanwhile of old Noel, who sat warming himself by the fire, "How's the child?"

"Bad," wheezed the grandfather, "bad, they tell me. Robert, he's gone over to Crab-Tree to try and hurry you up. You've been a terrible time coming, Doctor." Serocold shrugged his shoulder, chafing his hands together. "I've been delayed," he briefly explained.

He walked across the kitchen and pushed open the door of a bedroom beyond it; it was here that he had previously seen the child. The heat of the airless room struck him in the face as he entered; there was a heaped fire in the grate and a paraffin lamp burning, the window was tightly shut. Old Mrs. Noel sat by the fire, a little, toothless, apple-faced woman, wrinkled and worried; it had been useless to forbid her hanging over her grandchild, which she had lifted from its cot. The suffocating sound of its breathing filled the room; gasping, panting, struggling for air, it lay clutched in her arms. Doctor Serocold did not need a second glance at the livid and contorted face to tell him with what emergency he was confronted. There was not a moment to lose; the child was choking to death before his eyes.

It took a good deal to hurry the old man, but on this occasion he wasted no time. He dumped his black leather bag on the table, he pulled out of it, in frantic haste, a scalpel wrapped in gauze, a handful of wool and the tinkling silver toy that was a tracheotomy tube. With two words of explanation he snatched the child from the grandmother's arms. The old woman, scared by his haste, began to moan and wring her hands; there was no help to be got from her. He looked round, for once in his life at a loss, and saw the red leather coat behind him; Lady Susan had just come in. Appar-

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ently she understood his preparations ; he had no time to ask her how or why. " Better let me help," she said.

Her voice was unusually steady ; while he hesitated she pushed the old woman out of the door, took the child from him, rolled a blanket from the empty cot deftly round its struggling arms and sat down by the lamp with the bundle on her knees. She did not need his hasty directions ; she took the restless head between her hands and straightened out the labouring throat as the doctor, with a single, unhurried, delicate incision, divided the stretched skin and the cartilage of the windpipe together. A frothy splutter of blood mixed with air escaped from the tiny wound and ran down over her fingers. " Half a minute more . . ." said Doctor Serocold, feeling with his left hand for the silver tube. He coaxed it into place through the bubbling smother ; a gentle, sibilant respiration began immediately ; the livid flush drained from the child's face, leaving it pale and placid, the eyelids relaxed and closed. It was as if the doctor had worked a miracle. He pressed his forefinger to the artery throbbing beside the hollowed temple. What he felt there seemed to satisfy him ; for after a minute he took his hand away, mopped his own forehead and said, " Just about time, too. Thank you."

His helper did not reply. He repeated his gratitude, " You did exactly what I wanted. I don't know where I should have been without you." He sought her eyes across the circle of lamplight, but she avoided his look. " I did a bit of nursing in the war," she said indifferently. " I'm that generation." She tied the tapes of the tube behind the child's neck without being told to do so and laid it back in the cot. " I've got one of that age myself," he thought he heard her say, as if in apology, over her shoulder ; but before he could answer she turned round again and said, with all her former

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insolence, "Perhaps it's just as well that I did smash up your car."

IV

He did not find any answer to that ; he busied himself with the washing and disinfection of his hands and instruments, she accepted the coarse yellow cake of soap from him to wash the blood off her hands. She had never yet had time to take off that red leather coat of hers ; Serocold wondered whether the blood had stained that, too ; the colour would not betray it. "And what happens now ?" she enquired in her indifferent voice. He mused, "I shall have to think of some way to get the boy to the Isolation Hospital."

"Can't nurse this kind of thing here, I suppose ?" She glanced round disdainfully, but lowered her voice, for the door was ajar ; he matched his tone to hers as he agreed, "Not very well. Old Mrs. Noel is a goodsoul, but I can't trust her with it."

"Where's the mother ? Dead ?" He shrugged his shoulders. "No, she ran off with another man last year. They say this is his child, but I don't know ; at any rate she didn't take it with her. She was a worthless creature, at best but now there's no one to look after the children properly."

He got a strange glance at that, one which he was to remember later ; at the time he was occupied with his problem ; he went out to his explanations with the Noels. He was glad to turn from them to Lady Susan, as to an ally, certain of her comprehension. "If you could get a telephone message to the Isolation Hospital, from any place you pass, they'd send the ambulance out here for me and the child."

She replied, "I've gone a good way out of my road for you already. I may as well finish the job by driving you to the hospital. I suppose you can get home from there,"

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He was taken aback. "But you haven't time for that. It's four miles back, right out of your way, if you're going to Canley. What about your train?"

He saw something inexplicable in her face. She turned her head, inviting him mutely to look at the grandfather clock in the corner, whose sailing ship rocked out the minutes above a dial painted with faded flowers. Its hands pointed to twenty minutes past five. She said in a voice which had no expression of any kind, "My train's gone. I shall have to go back"; and after a definite pause she added vaguely the word, "home." He saw her shiver as if she were cold before she said, "Tell these people what you're going to do."

It was perhaps at that moment that he guessed her riddle. Some three quarters of an hour later, when the sick child had been carried into the hospital and he was preparing to follow it, he held her cold, ungloved hand in his grasp of farewell and told her, "I shan't forget what you did for me this afternoon."

"It's worth remembering" she retorted, "All of it." He did not contradict her; and as if in spite of herself, she reproached him, "You don't quite know how much it was."

"I think I do," said he gravely.

He could not see her face well, for they were outside the huts of the isolation hospital, in an unlighted drive choked with laurel bushes. Nevertheless he had an instinct that the emotion which distracted her was about to find its own words. He had received too many unexpected confessions in his time to feel any surprise when she blurted out, "I'd promised to meet someone at Canley. We could have got to London to-night and away together to-morrow. He's going out to Africa again; there's a boat sailing. Richard would divorce me all right, I think." Her broken phrases were hardly audible; she did not pro-

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nounce her lover's name. "That's all spoilt now," she said.

Doctor Serocold found it difficult to answer ; but a certain native instinct for definition in everything made him remind her, "You could still get to London to-night, in this."

"Ah, not now," said she. "It's too late. When I met you I had my mind all made up to go. Once I'd been stopped and given time to think, of course I changed it. That's where women are so idiotic ; they can't stick to a resolution." She mocked herself and him. "I can't go through all that over again" he heard her mutter ; he realised from the uncertainty of her voice how bitter had been the struggle which she shrank from renewing. From the darkness of the car she accused him, "You said yourself that children are never properly looked after once their mother leaves them."

He remembered then, though he had scarcely noted it at the time, how she had spoken of a young child of her own ; his grave and thoughtful mind accepted the chain of petty circumstances which had united them, not as an accident, but as her destiny. He had his own code of behaviour, but he would not preach it to this stranger in misery ; incalculably he found himself telling her, "There was a woman once who wouldn't leave her husband and children for me." He thought, with astonishment, "Why should I tell her about Emily ? This business must have shaken us more than we thought."

She displayed neither surprise nor pity ; she replied harshly, "Was she any the happier for that ?"

He said, still thinking of his own life, "Emily ? I don't know. I've stopped expecting happiness, for myself or anyone else ; it's too much a matter of chance. She had her work to do and I had mine. We weren't free."

"Where is she now ?"

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“Dead.” He used the word to silence her; he had not meant to open that old wound. “It’s all over, long ago.”

She cried out then, “But I’m just at the beginning. It’ll be a long, weary time before this is over, for me.” Her head sank, for the first time her voice failed. “Don’t think of that to-night. You’ve done your day’s work. Go home . . . get some sleep . . . to-morrow is another day and you’ll find strength to live through it.” She groaned, pressed her hands to her eyes, moved her head restlessly. “Do you think I shall find it so easy to sleep?” she reproached him.

“I can give you a dose that’ll make you sleep.” He suggested it with his doctor’s look, piercing and keen from beneath those grizzled eyebrows which hid his feelings from the world. She only shrugged her shoulders, “Thanks, I’ve plenty of those. Don’t you see; to-night I want to remember. To-morrow is soon enough to begin forgetting. I’ve all the rest of my life for that.”

She switched on the engine; the car began to throb and protest. “I don’t like your going home alone,” said the doctor. “But I’ve got to stop here for the present.” She only laughed; “I shan’t run into anyone else, if that’s what you mean,” she mocked him. Then suddenly and desperately, she told him, as the car began to move. “I suppose I shall feel grateful to you in a year’s time. Just now I wish I’d never seen you.”

The car glided past him into the darkness. He saw the tail-light disappear through the gate and caught a gleam of light on a red leather sleeve, put out to signal a turn, or perhaps a farewell. Then he was free to go back into the hospital and consider the best treatment for the Noel boy.

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The Waterfall

I

THE only sound in the air as Rose Vaughan hurried across the park was the thin glassy sound of the waterfall emptying itself into the half-frozen lake. The snow that had fallen a few days after Christmas had thawed and half-vanished already, leaving little snow islands dotted about the sere flattened grass under and between the wintry elms. It was freezing hard, the air silently brittle and bitter, the goose-grey sky threatening and even dropping at intervals new falls of snow, little handfuls of pure white dust that never settled. Now and then the black trees and the tall yellow reed-feathers and the dead plumes of pampas grass fringing the lake would stir and quiver, but with hardly a sound.

The winter afternoon darkness gave the new skin of ice across the lake a leaden polish in which the shadows of a few wild duck were reflected dimly. The duck, silent and dark, stood motionless on the ice as though frozen there, but as the woman came down the path and crossed the wooden bridge over the lake-stream they rose up frightened, soaring swiftly and with wild quackings flying round and round, their outstretched necks dark against the wintry sky.

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The woman, hurrying over the bridge and up the path under the trees, hardly noticed them. She walked with strange, long, half-running strides, as though walking were not quick enough for her and running too undignified. As the path ascended sharply from the lake she began to pant a little, breathing the icy air in gasps through her mouth. There was the desperation of fear in her haste. Her father, the Reverend Ezekiel Vaughan, lay very ill at the rectory, which stood at the far end of the park, where she herself had been born and had lived for forty years and where she expected to go on living until she died ; and she was hurrying to get across the park to the big house in order to telephone from there for the doctor. Her father was a man who had grown old before his time, and she had lived alone with him for so long that as she panted up the path, with her mouth a little open and her feet slipping backwards on the half-frozen path, she also looked prematurely middle-aged, her face joyless and negative, her pale grey eyes devoid of alertness and light.

She met no one coming down the path, and in her desperate hurry might not have seen them if she had. Until lately the path had been public, a right of way going far back in time, but at Christmas some deer in the park had been molested and the path closed. She and her father alone had been granted the special privilege of it. There had been a putting up and a breaking down of fences which had distressed her. She was distressed also because her father had said nothing, not a word, on the side of the people. " My silence," he said, " will be ample evidence of my impartiality." But it was clear enough, and to her painfully clear, that his sympathies were with Abrahams, the owner, whom he could not afford to offend. She had found herself despising for the first time the old liaison of church and property.

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It had struck her so forcibly that she had been angry, her anger breeding a kind of timid horror at the mere realisation of that emotion. Alone, as she hurried up the path, it was difficult to realise that she had ever cherished emotions, sinful emotions, like hatred and anger. And she felt ashamed, the pain of her conscience mingling with the pain of her fears.

Where the path divided into two she took the left-hand turn to the house. The right-hand path, formerly a way to the vicarage, had been cut off by a new snake-fence. She saw that the fence had been smashed down again. It had happened since the snow. She could see the scars and fractures made by the axes on the new skinned chestnut-stakes and the black foot-prints in the islands of snow.

She felt at once distressed again, and as she hurried on she half resolved to speak to Abrahams. She would reason with him ; she would make him see the pettiness of it all. He must see it. And she would make him see it, not for her own sake or for her own satisfaction, but for his own sake and the sake of his fellow men. Words of entreaty and reason came easily to her mind : "What you give comes back to you. It comes back a thousandfold. Surely you don't need me to tell you ?" softened and quickened by her fears and agitations about her father.

But suddenly the house appeared from behind its dark barricade of yew and pine. The sight of it, huge and red, with its weather-green cupola high on the grey roof, made her suddenly and inexplicably nervous, and her footsteps on the gravel drive and their echo among the trees seemed painfully loud to her in the frost-silent air.

She hurried up the steps leading to the terrace and the house. Along the terrace formal rows of flower-beds lay bleak and empty, the earth snow-flattened and lifeless. She rang the big brass door-bell and waited, apprehensive. A

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servant came, she murmured a request about the telephone, and a moment later she was in the entrance-hall, the door shut behind her.

The telephone stood on a large mahogany table in the hall. She sat down in a chair by the table, picked up the receiver and gave her number. She spoke very low, so that Abrahams, if he were about, should not hear her; but the operator could not catch what she said and asked her, once, twice and then even a third time, to repeat the number. She repeated it, her face growing hot and scarlet, her voice in her own ears so loud that she felt she was shouting and that Abrahams would hear and come into the hall. Her fears were multiplied into panic, all her resolutions to speak to Abrahams driven away. She gave her message for the doctor quickly, too quickly, so that again she had to repeat the words, and again louder.

In the middle of this confusion she became conscious of another voice. It was Abrahams, saying :

“ Let me see what I can do, Miss Vaughan.”

In another moment he was standing by her, had taken the telephone from her hands and was half-shouting : “ A message for the doctor. Yes, yes. Put a jerk in it, do. Ask him to come at once, for the Reverend. Yes, he’s very bad. It’s urgent. For the Reverend at once, please.”

She stood apart half-nervous, half-affronted, until he had finished speaking. His way of speaking about her father, off-handedly, as it were, as the Reverend, offended her. Yet when he put down the receiver she was forced to murmur her thanks.

“ And now I must go,” she added quickly.

“ Oh, stop an’ have a cup o’ tea,” he began.

“ Oh no, I must get back,” she said. “ I’m urgently needed. I must get back.”

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“ Ah, you can swallow a cup o’ tea in a jiff,” he insisted.
“ It’ll help to keep the cold out.”

But she was at the door, rigid, drawing on her thin kid gloves. Against her prim nervous voice Abraham’s seemed aggressively loud, almost coarsely self-confident. He himself was big-framed, getting to stoutness, his hair very grey above the red temples. He cultivated the prosperous country air, with loose check tweeds, a gold watch-chain, and brown boots as polished as a chestnut. But his butterfly-collar, stiff and white, and his black necktie upset the effect. He had made his money quickly, out of boots and shoes, during the war period, rising from nothing. The tightness, the struggle of the early years had left its mark ineffaceably on his features, his lips compressing narrowly and his eyes hardening, at unexpected moments, with unconscious avarice. Coming out into the country, to enjoy his money, he had lost his wife within a year and had presented the church with a window of stained glass in her memory. He still had about him the hardness, the bluster and the coarseness of the factory. And it was this about him which intimidated her and made her draw on her gloves, more rigidly and hastily, by the door.

Seeing that she would not stay he stood with his hand on the big iron door-latch.

“ And how is the Reverend ? ” he asked.

“ He’s very ill,” she said, “ very ill.”

“ I’m sorry to hear it, I am that, very sorry.”

It seemed an unconscionable time before he began to lift the door latch. In the interval, remembering her resolution to speak about the fence, she half-reproached herself ; it was her duty, now that her father could no longer speak, to say something. It was clearly her duty. But still she said nothing. The words she had formed so clearly and

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easily in her mind had been driven away by her panic and fear.

"Ah, well, if you must go," said Abrahams, lifting the door latch.

"I *must* go," she said. Her voice was strangely distant with its prim, polite emphasis.

"Anything I can do? Can I have anything sent down?" he said.

"Thank you," she said. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

She fled, buttoning her coat collar against the freezing air, not glancing back, knowing by the long interval before the sound of the door clangling, that he was watching her.

Down by the lake the waterfall fell with an even sharper, thinner sound in the ice-covered lake. The duck had not returned and the ice was empty of all life, growing darker every moment. Little patches of new black ice and frozen snow cracked under her feet as she panted up the path, beyond the lake, towards the rectory. The house, its grey stone drabbened but unsoftened by time and rain, stood half-hidden by a line of elms, a gaunt solitary place, walled in, with half its windows plastered over long ago, a squat stone belfry in the roof of the disused stables, a light burning in a single upstairs window. She hurried on, apprehensive, fearing the worst intuitively, falling into the old half-running, half-walking pace, hardly pausing to shut the gate in the stone wall of the garden.

Before she could reach the house the front door opened and the white figure of the servant-girl appeared and stood there ready to meet her. With tears in her voice she began to tell Rose Vaughan what she already half knew, that her father was dead.

SHE spent the first days of the New Year putting things in order, on wet days indoors, arranging her father's papers,

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packing his sermons into neat piles which she tied together with tape, rejecting old letters, reading through them and sometimes weeping a little and then reproaching herself both for reading and weeping. On fine days she and the servant girl carried the rejected papers out to the garden, in clothes-baskets, and set fire to them under the elms, but the earth and the dead elm-leaves were never dry and the papers burnt sluggishly, with thick, harsh smoke that hung under the wet trees and stung the women's eyes. At last rain set in, dismally and as though it would last the year, and a south-west wind that cried in the house and howled in the black, dripping elms. The burnt and half-burnt scraps of paper were blown about the garden like black and white leaves, until the rain soddened them at last and the wind hurled them into corners and under the clumps of dead chrysanthemum stalks that had never been cut down. Driven indoors again with no papers to arrange, the women scrubbed and polished the floors and furniture and washed the pictures and the windows. In that large house, built more than a hundred years before for a more spacious family than had ever lived in it, there were rooms which had never been used and some which had never been opened for twenty years. The women flung open their windows and the rain blew in on the mice-crumbled floor-boards, the old travelling-trunks, the piles of faded and forgotten church magazines, the rotting sunshades, the disused croquet sets, the piles of half-rotten apples laid out on sheets of *The Times* to dry for that winter and even the winter before. The women worked with a great show of noise and hustle, tiring themselves out in an unconscious effort to efface the effect and the memory of death.

Finally it was done ; all the rooms had been cleaned and aired, the last of the big heavy foot-worn carpets had been turned and re-laid, the clumsy mahogany furniture had been

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polished and set back in its original places, as though it had never been moved. And suddenly there was nothing to do. The wet January days, which had seemed so short, began to seem very long, and the house, which had seemed so bustling and alive, began to recapture the air of silence and death.

Like a veneer, the lively effect of clearing up the house began to wear off, leaving a drab under-surface of realities, a troublesome sense of loss, a dread of loneliness and bills and formalities. There was a will. The rector had left a little over a hundred and fifty pounds. With the books and the furniture it was to come to Rose; so that there would, perhaps, after the sale, be two hundred and fifty pounds.

She realised that it was nothing. It might last her, with care, with extreme, bitter care, for five years—no more than a day out of the life which lay before her. To supplement it she might do a little private teaching. She would see, she would have to see. The house would no longer be hers; there would, of course, be another rector. These things seemed to her a cruel complication of realities, a kind of equation she had never been brought up to solve.

But one thing she saw, instantly. The servant must go. And having sacked her she felt at once an insufferable loneliness. Parishioners called in the afternoons and she called in return on them, but after darkness she sat there, in the vast house, absolutely alone, with nothing to think of except herself and her dead father, her mind fretted by its own fears and its half-imagined fears. She was driven to bed at nine o'clock and then eight and even earlier, with the bible from which her father had taught her to read a passage every night since childhood. Upset one evening and going up to bed early to cry herself to sleep, she woke, half through the night, to remember that she had forgotten, for the first time, and for as long as she could remember, to read that passage. She went

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downstairs with a candle to find her bible. As she came back the candlelight fell on something white lying in the passage, by the front door. She picked it up, a letter.

It was a note from Abrahams, asking her if she could not go to tea on the following day. Inexplicably she felt offended. The very tone and language of the letter seemed offensive : "What about coming to tea one day, say to-morrow (Thursday). Should like to discuss question of memorial to Reverend. Need not reply. Will send car." It was so common, so detestable that she felt quite suddenly enraged.

In the morning, trying to forget the letter, she succeeded only in recalling its words and renewing her own annoyance. She went about in a state of prim, rigid vexation, the very attitude she would adopt if she were to meet Abrahams. But beneath it all she was inexplicably afraid of seeing him.

And quite suddenly she saw it differently. She would go ; of course she would go. Not to go would seem so childish, so discourteous. She was not sure that it was not even her duty to go.

So in the afternoon she was ready, in black, except for the thin stitched lines of white on the back of her tight black gloves, when the car arrived. No sooner was she sitting, silent, behind the chauffeur, than she wished she had not come.

As the car drove down the hill from the rectory, towards the village, and then up by the private road through the park she stared out of the windows at the wet January landscape, noticing for the first time the red misty flush of elm and beech buds, and then, in the park, the first flicker of aconites, coldest yellow, uncurling in the winter grass. Farther up, under the shelter of the house and its yews, a few odd half-opened snowdrops, like frailest white toadstools, bloomed about the grass. The flowers, so early, filled her with a sense of comfort shot with flashes of envy.

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In the house it was so warm that she could have fallen asleep. She and Abrahams sat by a huge fire of wood in the drawing-room, she with her hat and gloves still on, parochial fashion, the words "I mustn't stay" rising from long, foolish habit to her prim lips.

"Ah, make yourself at home," said Abrahams, genially.

Dotted about the room, on tables and in the deep window sills, were bowls of blue and white hyacinths, whose fragrance she breathed with an unconscious show of deep pleasure, longingly.

Abrahams seemed pleased and was telling her how he had planted the bulbs himself and how much he had given for them when tea arrived, the pot and jugs and tray of silver.

"After tea I'll show you in the conservatory," said Abrahams. "Interested in flowers, I know?"

"I am indeed," she said.

She had withdrawn herself again, sitting stiff, straight up, on the edge of the chair.

"Take your things off," Abrahams insisted, "while I pour out. You'll be cold when you go out again."

"Oh! I mustn't stay."

"Be blowed. What's your hurry? Not such a lot to get back for, have you?"

She could have wept. There was a kind of forced geniality about his words which seemed to her brutal. They were full, too, of unconscious truth. She knew so very well that there was no hurry, that she had nothing to get back for. And she could have wept at her own hypocrisy and from the pain of his unconscious truth and brutality. But she removed her gloves instead, finger by finger, aloof and meticulous, folding and pressing them on her lap and then gently rubbing the blood back into her starved white fingers.

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“ You’re cold,” said Abrahams. “ Why don’t you come nearer the fire ? ”

“ My hands are just a little chilled,” she told him. “ That’s all.”

“ Know what they say ! ” he laughed. “ Cold hands—warm heart.”

She was frigid. She tried to put into her silence an austere disapproval of that familiarity. It did not succeed. He had poured out tea and was handing the cup to her, not noticing either the austerity of her silence or her sudden confusion as she took the cup.

“ You drink that—you’ll feel a little warmer about the gills.”

“ Thank you,” she said.

With the cup in her hands she tried to renew the old austere silence. But she needed the tea and she began to drink with tiny sips, cautiously, the thin scraggy guides of her neck tautening as she tried to swallow noiselessly. Abrahams drank also, stirring his tea briskly and then drinking with quick guzzling sips. Watching him, she forgot her resolution to be silent in her revulsion at the sound of his loud sipping and the sight of the tea-drips shining, like spittle, on the bristles of his greyish moustache.

She watched him, fascinated, until he put down his cup and wiped his tea-wet moustache with the back of his hand.

“ Well now,” he said, “ about the Reverend.”

She wanted to protest, as always, against the use of that word. It was the very emblem of his familiar vulgarity. But it was useless. He went on quickly, before she could speak :

“ I like to see a man have his due and—well, no use beating about the bush, Miss Vaughan. I should like to see a memorial put up to the Reverend. That’s what. A stone or

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a window—anything, I don't care as long as its for the church and is worthy of your father."

He stopped abruptly. With her cup still in her hands, Miss Vaughan was crying, the thin half-checked tears falling soundlessly on her black dress and into her tea-cup.

He let her go on, without a word or a gesture. And vaguely she was aware of his silence as being a comfort to her, and her tears began to come more easily, without pain, giving her relief.

At last she could blow her nose and lift her head and glance sideways through the window, in the pretence that nothing had happened and in the hope also that he would act as though nothing had happened.

But he took her cup, and emptying the slops into the basin said :

" Nothing like a good cry. I know what it is to lose someone."

The words brought the tears stinging up to her eyes again, but she twisted her lips and kept silent. She felt sorry, then, not for herself but for him.

" I should——" she began, but she could go no further.

" Don't worry," he said. " Drink your tea."

She found herself obeying, drinking with confusion, but with a strange and inexplicable sense of comfort.

" We can talk about it later," he said.

She only nodded. Her eyes were red from crying and her voice hardly audible, and in her black clothes and black hat she looked old and pale, tired out.

He suddenly jumped up. " I was going to show you the conservatory, wasn't I ? "

The old prim austerity of manner came back to her as his voice resumed its turn of familiarity.

" Oh ! no, I think I must go."

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But he took no notice and before she could protest they were through the hall, where she had once used the telephone, and through the glass doors leading to the conservatory, the damp warmth of the place and the breath of its flowers and ferns meeting them heavily and sweetly as they entered.

He was very proud of the place. He had fitted up electric lamps in the roof along the stages where the flowers stood, and he began to switch the lights on and then off and then on again so that she could see the difference between the flower-colours and the greenness in the raw January light and in the white lamp-brilliance. The scents of hyacinth and freesia were exotic, the colours of the waxy petals very pure and delicate. And unconsciously, for the first time, she lived for a few moments outside herself, delighting in the flowers, forgetting that attitude of parochial stiffness which she had worn for so long that it was almost like second nature. Abrahams, delighted also, gave one or two of his sudden heavy laughs and she laughed also almost without realising it. Between the laughter she touched and breathed the flowers, all except the frail powdery pink and yellow primula, cow-slip-scented, which he would not let her touch.

“ You don’t want to be infected, do you ? ” he asked.

“ With what ? ”

He told of the skin disease which the touch of the primula could give.

“ Oh ! that’s just a story,” she cried.

“ No, it’s right.”

“ Well ! I don’t care ! ” she cried. She buried her face in the pink candelabra of blossoms with a sensation of doing something very delicious and abandoned.

It was not until she was back, alone, in the silence of the rectory that the significance of her behaviour struck her

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fully, and at the thought of it she broke out in a perspiration of shame, her prim soul curling up within her with horror. Oh ! she had been very stupid. It had all been very silly, very thoughtless. And memory only made it more vivid and painful.

She went to bed early, trying to forget it. But in the morning a messenger and a message arrived from Abrahams, the messenger with pots of pink hyacinth and primula, the message asking her if she would go to tea, and again discuss the memorial, on Sunday.

As she read the note and saw the flowers she went very weak.

“ There is no answer,” she said.

She went about for the rest of the week in an agony of shame and indecision. Yet the answer had to be written. There was no help for it. It was her duty to write. She must not shrink from her duty.

She delayed answering till Saturday and then wrote, fearfully, to say that she would endeavour to look in, if she might, after Sunday school. The word endeavour, she felt, kept her at an austere distance. It made her answer negative of all emotion, saved her from new embarrassments.

In the park the aconites had opened back flat, vivid lemon, in the watery January sun, and higher up, under the yews there were myriad snow drops among the stiff, dark crocus leaves. And again, in spite of herself, she was envious.

She put on the old prim parochial attitude, sitting with her gloves on, as Abrahams talked of the memorial to her in the warm drawing-room. “ Yes, I see,” she would say, in agreement ; or “ I am not prepared to say,” in disagreement. It was as if she were stiffly resolved not to commit herself again, either to tears or laughter.

“ Well then,” said Abrahams, as she rose to go,

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“you’ll decide between the broken column and the stained window.”

“It is very kind of you.”

“The sooner we know the better. What if you come up again on Sunday?”

“Oh! I really don’t know.”

She spoke as though terrified, as though to say yes and to come again were against all her most cherished principles of duty and propriety.

“You can send a note and tell me,” said Abrahams, “when I send some more flowers.”

She fled, half-glad to be back in the rectory with its silence and damp book-odours and solitude.

But on the following Sunday she was half-glad to leave it again. The agony of the silence and solitude had begun to wear her thin and white, thinner and whiter even than before. To see the aconites, to sit in the warm drawing-room, to talk with a fellow-creature again—it was all a little intoxicating to her.

Then, quite suddenly, without preparation, as they were having tea and talking of the memorial, deciding on the stained glass, Abrahams asked if she would marry him.

She sat silent, staring, her face absolutely blank in pained astonishment. Suddenly, as if to reassure her, Abrahams smiled. She turned upon him instantly with a voice of half-weeping protest :

“You’re joking! You’re joking!”

He rose and put his arm on her shoulder. “No, no. I’m serious, I mean it.”

“I—I—I—” but she could not speak and he sat for a long time with his arm on her shoulders while she sat struggling with her tears and astonishment.

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“Don’t cry,” he said. “Don’t cry. All in good time.”

She wept openly. He reasoned with her a little afterwards, but it was that unexpected tenderness in his voice which finally decided her. She tried to reason against it all, but the recollection of that emotion always triumphed.

A week later she accepted. The question of love did not touch her. She had long ago begun to teach herself that marriage and love were words which did not interest her. She reasoned that it was not a question of love, but of duty, and she was secure in that.

They were married in the spring.

THE rains of late winter continued desolately into spring, drenching the crocuses until they bent over like limp, spent candles of orange and purple and white, weighing down the first greenish canary buds of the daffodils by the lake. Along all the low-lying land by the stream, the park was flooded, the young leaves of celandine struggling up, yellow-tipped, through the water, and Abrahams was worried because even when the rain ceased and the sun had attained its first spring-power, the water did not drain away. In his concern he would walk down to the stream every morning, testing the height of the water by wooden stakes he had had driven in and marked, pacing up and down the grass, pausing often, to consider what might be done. He would come back to lunch with a frown on his face, impatient; he wanted the place right, and he must have it right, he would have it right. Rose would say nothing but “Yes” or “No,” as his tone demanded, obedient to a half-conscious resolution never to assert herself, never to disagree, never to do anything which might bring them into a state of intimacy. She often committed a kind of sin against herself in order to keep

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up that negative serenity. If Abrahams suggested deepening the stream she too would say "I was thinking so myself," or if he changed his mind abruptly, thinking that he might raise the banks of the stream, she would change her mind also, saying "I feel sure it would be better." But it was a sin of duty, the sin that she had practised so long with her father that it was already both a habit and a virtue. She was scarcely conscious of it. And if Abrahams asked, as he did very rarely, for her opinion, she would manage, by some remark like "Oh ! it's quite beyond my poor brain" to excuse herself and at the same time flatter him.

So when the question of the floods and the stream worried Abrahams she was worried also, and going down to the stream with him one afternoon she stood or paced about the grass in a pretence of harassed thought, just as he did. At last, when Abrahams had walked far up the brook to survey from a fresh point, she sat down for a moment on the deer-smoothed bole of an elm and watched the flood-water and the yellow hosts of celandine in the damp places beyond. The stream itself came down quietly and the spring air was so still that she could hear every drop of its gentle fall into the lake below. Then, quite suddenly, as she sat watching and listening, the whole problem of the flood seemed clear to her. Surely all that they had to do was to widen the stream and deepen its fall and make a new weir into the lake, so that the stream could take more water and take it faster.

She got up and called Abrahams, timidly, and when he came back to her she told him, repeating often "I know its quite silly and impossible." He listened and walked down to the waterfall and then, looking upstream, considered it all. Standing still, she watched the sunlight on the flowers and the water again in a state of timid apprehension until he disturbed her with a shout of excitement :

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" You've got it ! " He was already hurrying upstream to her. " Can't think why it didn't come to me before. Can't imagine for the life of me why I didn't think of it." He was very excited.

" Oh ! You would have thought of it," she said.

" I don't know so much, I don't know so much," he kept saying, as they hurried back to the house. " You must have been thinking it all out on the quiet."

" Oh ! no, oh no," she said. " Only sometimes I used to notice that even when there was water still standing about there was only a trickle at the waterfall."

" And I never noticed it," he marvelled. " And I never noticed it. You're a bit of a marvel."

" Oh no," she deprecated. " It's nothing, really it's nothing."

Back at the house he telephoned to the drainage engineers : they would send over a man in the morning, early.

In the morning, soon after breakfast, a little flap-hooded car, mud-flecked and ramshackle, chattered up the drive, swishing the gravel recklessly. A young man alighted and rang the front door bell six times, with comic effect, and Abrahams, in his enthusiasm, answered the door himself, and a moment or two later the car started again and chattered away into the park. When it returned again to the house, just before one o'clock, Abrahams and the young man seemed to be hilarious.

" Rose," said Abrahams as they came in to lunch. " This is the engineer, Mr. Phillips."

Hearing their laughter, she had put on something of the old prim austerity of manner, in unconscious disapprobation.

" How d'ye do Mrs. Abrahams ? " said Phillips, shaking hands ; and catching in a flash the feeling of cool distance

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in her outstretched hand : " I'll bet you wondered what the tide had washed up, didn't you Mrs. Abrahams ? "

" I did wonder," she said, " what all the laughter was about."

" Oh ! Mr. Phillips is a case," said Abrahams. " He's a fair caution. I haven't laughed so much for years."

" Ah ! but be careful," said Phillips. He advanced, and tapping Abrahams' waistcoat, said with a mock seriousness that set Abrahams tittering again : " Do you know, sir, that the valves of your heart are worn out ? Yes sir, worn out. Absolutely finished. You may go pop any minute. Punctured."

And, as Abrahams wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes, Rose smiled a small, half-stiff, half-indulgent smile with unparted lips.

At the lunch table Phillips was irrepressible. He was a rather small, fleshy man, with a cherubic face and little vivid eyes that shone and quivered like blue glass marbles, with ecstatic joviality. His face was the face of a true comedian. He was never still, never silent. His eyes travelled electrically everywhere, untiringly, in search of fresh jokes, jokes which, when they came, might have been in bad taste, but for some reason never were. Rose sat at first aloof and frigid, as though ready to freeze the first germ of indelicacy or blasphemy, but it never came. " The wages of gin," said Phillips once, taking up his water to drink, " is breath." Her face stiffened, then, with its first and only sign of offence, a sign that was lost on both Phillips and Abrahams, laughing into their napkins. After that she sat a little less strained and less upright, though still with a shadow of severity in her face, her smiles mere polite motions of her thin lips. Phillips saw this, and as though it were all a game in which she must keep her lips set and smiling while he tried to make her smile in spite of it, he began to direct his jokes at her. It

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flattered her subtly, and gradually, in spite of herself, she felt warmer and more tolerant of him, and at last she broke out softly "Oh ! Mr. Phillips you're too bad ! "

" You'll laugh, Mrs. Abrahams, you'll laugh if you're *not* careful," cried Phillips. " You'll laugh, as sure as my name's Napoleon. You will—I warn you. You'll laugh. Now, now !—smile but don't laugh. Smile—" he threw his napkin over his head, like a photographer, his voice comically muffled—" *smile* please. That's it—now hold it—the left hand clasped on the right—splendid—exquisite—how delighted *he* will be—enchanting ! Hold it—one—moment—tchtk ! "

He threw the napkin off his head, making gestures of mock despair. " But you *laughed*—you *laughed*," he cried.

" Oh dear," she said, her face flushed and her eyes moist with confusion and laughter. " And no wonder."

" Ah ! didn't I tell you he was a case !" cried Abrahams.

" Oh ! how silly of me," said Rose, wiping her eyes.

Phillips was still making them laugh, Rose still half against herself, when they went down to the lake in the afternoon. Rose was unprepared to go, but first Abrahams and then Phillips insisted, Abrahams saying :

" It's really my wife's idea—she first saw how it could be done."

" Oh, no, really," said Rose.

" Now, now, Mrs. Abrahams," Phillips joked. " Come, come. Don't be afraid. The big man will pull out the nasty tooth and then it will all be over."

" Really you could do much better without me," she said.

But she went with them, protesting a little out of politeness and biting her lips or twisting them in order to keep her laughter quite circumspect. By the lake the kingcups had opened wide, their yellow petals glistening as though var-

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nished, and farther up the slopes of grass, in the damp places, the first lady smocks trembled, tenderest mauve, still half-shut, on fragile stems. In the hollow by the flood water the sun was quite hot, and Rose, sitting down on an elmbole again, could hear spring in the silence, a silence broken only by the singing of larks, far up, and the trickling of the waterfall, both very sweet and soft, the water faintest like an echo of the birds.

While she sat there, Abrahams and the engineer surveyed the stream, made notes, took measurements, and at intervals laughed a great deal. When they returned to her Abrahams was simmering with enthusiasm, like a boy—it could be done, the thing could be done, easily, just as she had said it could !

“ Not easily,” cried Phillips, serious for once. “ It will take time—all summer.”

“ Time’s nothing,” said Abraham. “ Nor money. I want the thing done, that’s all.”

Phillips returned to the house for tea. Abrahams had taken a fancy to him, there was more laughter, and at last Abrahams suggested that Phillips, instead of driving backwards and forwards from the town each day, should come and spend the summer at the house with them. It would be so much easier, so much more convenient. Phillips seemed to hesitate and then said :

“ Could I fish in the lake ? ”

“ Fish ? You’re not joking ? You can fish, swim, row—do anything.”

“ I should like to come then,” said Phillips.

Before the week was out he had brought over his belongings and before the end of another week the work by the lake was in progress, a band of workmen arriving each morning in a lorry and Phillips driving down in his dilapidated car soon afterwards, to superintend. He rushed hither

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and thither all morning, untiring, coming back to the house at noon to eat a hasty meal, fling off a joke or two, and then return. Dumps of yellow clay and piles of pink brick and wooden shacks for the workmen appeared by the lake and became visible from the house through the half-leafed trees.

Every afternoon, if it were fine, Rose and Abrahams walked down to watch the work. She, while Abrahams talked with Phillips, sat on the elm-bole and watched the workmen digging out the pure yellow-clay, like stiff cheese, as they deepened and widened the trench which later would be the new water-course. Farther up they had dammed the stream and only a thin trickle of water came down the trench, so that the waterfall was soundless and dry.

On the first evenings, when the dusk still fell early and a little cold, Abrahams and Phillips would go into the billiard-room and the click of the billiard balls would be drowned by their boisterous laughter until Rose at last would join them, ostensibly to see if they needed anything, but in reality to share that laughter.

At first it was an unconscious habit to go down to the lake each afternoon and into the billiard room each evening. Then it became a conscious thing, something to which she looked forward. Realising it, she reproved herself at once, and she did not go down to watch the work for two afternoons. But first Phillips and then Abrahams noticed it, and Phillips made gentle banter about it, half teasing. Strangely, she felt hurt, and the next afternoon she went down to watch the work again. But Phillips was not there. When Abrahams explained that he had gone off on business for the afternoon she felt a spasm of unexpected disappointment that was almost a shock.

It was already early June, and Phillips had gone into town, not on business, but to fetch his fishing-tackle. In the

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evening and again the next evening he was at the lake and she did not see him until late. Coming back on the second evening he carried an immense basket, covered with green reeds, staggering along with it like a man with a load of lead. The basket was for her — an offering. He went through mock solemnities. At last, when she removed the reeds, it was to reveal a roach, pink and silver, no bigger than a sardine. It was all that the basket contained. At the joke Abrahams and Phillips went off into explosive laughter.

It was a laughter in which, inexplicably, she could not join. She felt hurt again, and again without knowing why. It was as if they were laughing at her, and she could not bear it.

For a day or two she felt a strange resentment against Phillips. She went down to the lake, but she hardly spoke to him, and in the evenings his laughter irritated her. And suddenly she closed up, as into a shell again, with all the old primness and straight-lipped austerity.

Phillips, as before, noticed it.

“Have I done anything to offend you?” he said, one afternoon by the stream.

“To offend me?” she said. “Why should I be offended?”

But the very tone of her voice was offended. As soon as he had walked away she hurried over the bridge, past the lake, and took the old path up to the rectory. At the top of the slope she sat down, in the sunshine, to regain her breath and think and come to a decision about it all. When she got up again she had solved the problem with the old formula and was half-content. It was her duty to behave differently to him. She would make amends. She would apologise. It was her duty to apologise.

Yet the days went past and she never apologised. She began to avoid Phillips and then, having avoided him, would

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feel wretched. He, absorbed in his fishing seemed to take not the faintest notice of her.

She had half-made up her mind that if he spoke to her again she would make the fishing an excuse for her behaviour. He had begun to fish on Sundays. She objected to that. Yet, when he asked if she objected she said "No," as if she had not the heart to rob him of that pleasure. And so he fished all day on Sundays, taking food with him, sitting lost in the reeds that grew taller and ranker as the summer richened to midsummer, and to the first arid days of July. Coming back in the evening there would be the same jocularity as ever, the same mocking play on something, the same roars of laughter from Abrahams. She sat aloof, as though it did not interest her. Then, after one intense, cloudless, blazing Sunday by the lake, Phillips returned in the evening without a single fish, not even a stickleback, not so much as an under-grown roach with which to play another joke on her.

For the first time since she had known him Phillips was silent, in absolute dejection. She could not resist the opportunity :

"Well," she said, "perhaps it will be a lesson to you."

"A lesson?—What in?"

"A lesson not to abuse the sabbath."

He burst into roars of laughter. "So you think the fish know Sunday when it comes!" he said.

There was no derision either in his words or his laughter. But she was bitterly hurt again. Yet it comforted her to go about nursing that sense of injury secretly.

Then also she hoped that he would, perhaps, take notice of what she had said and not go to the lake on the following Sunday. It would mean that he had, once at least, taken her seriously.

But the next Sunday, when she came down to breakfast,

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he had already gone. Hard and aloof, she put on her white gloves and went to church with Abrahams. It was nothing, she must forget it, it meant nothing to her. But she was troubled and would not acknowledge it and by noon she had fretted herself into a strange state of misery which her denials only increased.

In the afternoon she could endure it no longer. She left Abrahams asleep and went out into the hot Sunday stillness, across the Terrace and down into the park. She had made up her mind : she would walk by the lake, he would see her, she would speak to him, there would be an end to it all.

As she walked along, in and out of the great tree shadows, she reasoned out what she would say. It seemed very simple : she would say that his violation of her dearest principles had hurt her. That was all. Not in those very words, perhaps, but she would convey that. She would make him understand.

Before she was aware of it she was by the lake. Panic-stricken, she hurried along, looking straight ahead along the reed-fringed bank, never pausing once until she caught sight, on the opposite bank, of Phillips, in his shirt-sleeves, watching over his rod, the wet float flashing scarlet in the white sunlight. But she hurried along, terrified that he might see her or shout, never pausing even when she was out of sight.

Back at the house she was angry that he had not noticed her. She felt that he had seen her and then, purposely, with deliberate indifference, had ignored her. And then, illogically, she felt a moment of acute tenderness for him. Perhaps, after all, he had not seen her, had been too absorbed even to look up. She must not misjudge him. It was her duty not to misjudge him.

For some weeks she went about half-comforted and half-troubled by the renewal of that anger and tenderness, not

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understanding either. Then one morning, at breakfast, Phillips declared :

“ Well, another week and you can turn on the new tap.”

She sat very straight in her chair, prim but intense.

“ Then you will be leaving us ? ” she said.

“ Yes—no more fishing on Sundays.”

She could not speak.

A week later the work of the lake was finished.

“ Mrs. Abrahams ought to pull the lever,” suggested Phillips.

“ Oh ! No ! ” she said. “ Really no.”

“ But that’s only proper,” said Abrahams. “ It was your idea. Yes, you pull the lever. We must do it properly.”

“ But I shouldn’t be strong enough,” she protested desperately.

“ You don’t need to be,” said Phillips. “ I’ll work it so that just a touch will be enough.”

“ It’s easy,” said Abrahams. “ Phillips will make it easy.”

She gave in. And on the afternoon itself she walked down to the lake with Abrahams and Phillips. The first trees were turning yellow, a few leaves floated about the still lake, and the air was very quiet. An odd workman or two stood about and she felt half-afraid. Phillips had arranged it so that she should raise a lever and that the old dam should collapse and release the water. It was very simple.

Everything was ready. Phillips and Abrahams and the workmen stood waiting. She lifted her hand to the lever and then, at the last moment, hesitated. Her hands were trembling.

“ All you have to do is pull the lever,” said Phillips quietly. “ It’s easy.”

The next moment she made an immense effort. She clenched the lever desperately and pulled it.

There was a sudden crash as the dam itself collapsed and

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then a roar, increasing rapidly, as the water tore down through the new channel, with Phillips and Abrahams running excitedly along the banks to see the first leap of water into the lake, and then at last there was a sound of thunder as the water fell. The sound for a moment was terrific. She stood in suspense, startled. At her feet the water tore down the channel furiously, so that she went giddy from looking at it, and there was a shower of soft white spray as the torrent thundered into the lake. She had never believed that there could be so much water. She stood pale and motionless with tears in her eyes, not knowing what to do.

The tears began to run down her cheeks. Afraid that the men might see her she suddenly turned away and began to walk away up the slope under the trees. She heard the voices of the men call after her but she did not turn. Her tears kept on, and behind her the torrent of water roared with soft thunder, incessant, as though everlasting.

She hurried on as though afraid of it and long after she could hear it no more, the echo of it, like a remembered emotion, thundered through her mind.

The next morning Phillips went away.



The wrong turning

THE way he helped her into the boat was delicious, simply delicious : it made her feel like a grown-up lady to be taken so much care of—usually, people didn't mind how you got in and out of things, as you were only thirteen. And before he let her step off the landing he took her strap of books from her—those wretched schoolbooks, which stamped her, but which she hadn't known how to get rid of: her one chance of going for a row was secretly, on her way home from school. But he seemed to understand, without being told, how she despised them, and he put them somewhere in the boat where they wouldn't get wet, and yet she didn't need to see them. (She wondered what he had done with his own.)

He was so *nice*; everything about him was nice. His velvety brown eyes and white teeth; his pink cheeks and fair hair. And when he took his coat off and sat down, and rolled up his sleeves and spanned his wrists on the oars, she liked him better still : he looked so strong . . . almost as if he could have picked the boat up and carried it. He wasn't at all forward either (she hated cheeky boys): when he had to touch her hand he went brick red, and jumped his own hand away as quick as he could.

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With one stroke they were off and gliding downstream . . . oh, so smoothly! It made her think of floating in milk . . . though the water was *really* brown and muddy-looking. Soon they would be quite away from the houses and the little back-gardens and allotments that ran down to the water, and out among the woods, where the river twisted like a snake, and the trees hung over the edge and dipped their branches in . . . most romantically. Then perhaps he would say something. He hadn't spoken yet; he was too busy rowing, making great sweeps with the oars, and not looking at her . . . or only taking a peep now and then, to see if she saw. Which she did, and her heart thumped with pleasure. Perhaps, as he was so clever at it, he'd be a sailor when he was a man and go to sea. But that would mean him travelling far away, and she might never see him again. And though she'd only known him for a fortnight, and at first he hadn't liked to speak, but had just stood and made eyes at her when they met going home from school, she felt she simply couldn't bear it if he did.

To hide her feelings, she hung one hand over the side of the boat and let it trail through the water—keeping it there long after it was stone cold, in the hope that he would notice it and say something. But he didn't.

The Boy was thinking: I wonder if I dare tell her not to . . . her little hand . . . all wet like that, and cold. I should like to take it in both mine, and rub it dry, and warm it. *How* pretty she is, with all that fuzzy-wuzzy hair, and the little curls on her forehead. And how long her eyelashes are when she looks down. I wish I could make her look up . . . look at me. But how? Why, say something, of course. But what? Oh, if *only* I could think of something! What does one? What would Jim say, if he wanted to **make** his girl look at him?

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But nothing came.

Here, however, the hand was jerked from the water to kill a gnat that had settled on the other.

This was his cue. He parted hastily with his saliva.

“I say! Did it sting?”

She suppressed the no that was on her lips. “Well . . . yes . . . I think it did, rather.” And doubling her bony little schoolgirl fingers into her palm, she held out the back of the hand for his inspection.

Steadying the oars, the Boy leant forward to look, leant so far that, for a wild moment, she believed he was going to kiss the place, and half instinctively, half from an equally strong impulse to “play him,” drew it away. But he did not follow it up: at the thought of a kiss, which *had* occurred to him, shyness lamed him anew. So nothing came of this either.

And we’ve only half an hour, thought the Girl distractedly. If he doesn’t say something . . . soon . . . there won’t be any time left. And then it will all have been for nothing.

She, too, beat her brains. “The trees . . . aren’t they pretty?—the way they hang right down in the water.” (Other couples stopped under these trees, she’d seen them, and lay there in their boats; or even went right in behind the weeping willows.)

But his sole response was: “Good enough.” And another block followed.

Oh, he saw quite well what she was aiming at: she wanted him to pull in to the bank and ship his oars, so that they could do a bit of spooning, she lying lazy in the stern. But at the picture a mild panic seized him. For, if he couldn’t find anything to say even when he was rowing, it would be ten times harder when he sat with his hands before him and nothing to do. His tongue would stick to the roof of his

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mouth, dry as a bone, and then she'd see for sure how dull he was. And never want to go out with him again. No, thank you, not for him !

But talk wasn't everything—by gum, it wasn't ! He might be a rotten hand at speechifying, but what he could *do*, that he'd jolly well show her ! And under this urge to display his strength, his skill, he now fell to work in earnest. Forward swung the oars, cleanly carving the water, or lightly feathering the surface ; on flew the boat, he driving to and fro with his jaws grimly set and a heightened colour, the muscles standing out like pencils on his arms. Oh, it was a fine thing to be able to row so well, and have a girl, *the* girl, sitting watching you. For now her eyes hung on him, mutely adoring, spurring him on to ever bolder strokes.

And then a sheerly dreadful thing happened. So lost was he in showing his mastery, in feeding on her looks, that he failed to keep his wits about him. And, coming to a place where the river forked, he took the wrong turning, and before he knew it they were in a part where you were not supposed to go—a bathing-place for men, much frequented by soldiers.

A squeal from the Girl roused him ; but then it was too late : they had shot in among a score of bathers, whose heads bobbed about on the surface like so many floating footballs. And instantly her shrill cry was taken up and echoed and re-echoed by shouts, and laughter, and rude hullos, as the swimmers scattered before the oars. Coarse jokes were bandied, too, at the unwarranted intrusion. Hi ! wasn't there nowhere else he could take his girl ? Or was she coming in, too ? Off with her togs then !

Crimson with mortification at his blunder, at the fool he had made of himself (before her), the Boy savagely strove to turn the boat and escape. But the heads—there seemed to

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be hundreds of them—deliberately blocked his way. And while he manœuvred, the sweat trickling down his forehead, a pair of arms and shoulders reared themselves from the water, and two hands grasped the side of the boat. It rocked ; and the Girl squeaked anew, shrinking sideways from the nearness of the dripping, sunburnt flesh.

“ Come on, missie, pay toll ! ”

The Boy swore aloud.

But even worse was to come. On one bank, a square of wooden palisades had been built out round a stretch of water and a wooden bath-house, where there were cabins for the men to strip in, platforms to jump from, ropes strung for those who could not swim. But in this fence was a great gap, where some of the palings had fallen down. And in his rage and confusion the Boy had the misfortune to bring the boat right alongside it ; and then . . . then. . . . Inside the enclosure, out of the cabins, down the steps, men were running, jumping, chasing, leap-frogging . . . every one of them as naked as on the day he was born.

For one instant the Girl raised her eyes—one only . . . but it was enough. She saw. And he saw that she saw.

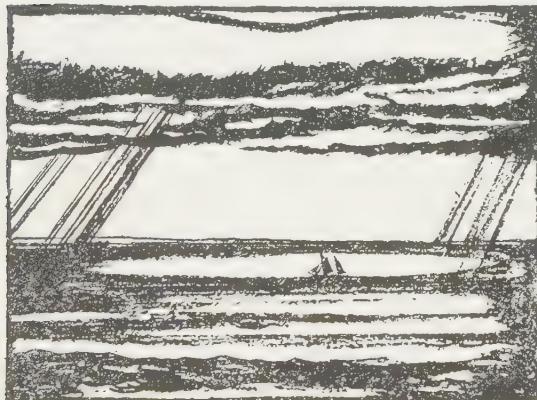
And now, to these two young creatures, it seemed as if the whole visible world—themselves, boat, river, trees and sky—caught fire, and blazed up in one gigantic blush. Nothing existed for them any more but this burning redness. Nor could they escape ; there they had to sit, knee to knee, face to face, and scorch, and suffocate ; the blood filling their eyes till they could scarcely see, mounting to their hair-roots, making even their finger-tips throb and tingle.

Gritting his teeth, the Boy rowed like a machine that had been wound up and was not to be stopped. The Girl sat with drooped head—it seemed to have grown strangely heavy—and but a single wish : to get out and away . . .

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where he could not see her. For all was over between them—both felt that. Something catastrophic had happened, rudely shattering their frail young dreams ; breaking down his boyish privacy, pitching her headlong into a reality for which she was in no wise prepared.

If it had been hard beforehand to find things to say, it was now impossible. And on the way home no sound was to be heard but the dip of the oars, the water's cluck and gurgle round the boat. At the landing-place, she got out by herself, took from him, without looking up, her strap of books, and said a brief good-bye ; keeping to a walking pace till she had turned the corner, then breaking into a run, and running for dear life . . . as if chased by some grotesque nightmare-shape which she must leave far, far behind her . . . even in thought.



SEÁN O'FAOLÁIN

Jubilee in the North Abbey

I

IN their starched and pointed coifs, beaklike, their winged blue sleeves, their skirts pouched about them like balloons, the sisters of Saint John of the Cross look for all the world like geese or hens. As they talk their cowls slew about in the air. They move as if on castors.

But, in her heyday, Mother Matilda simply was a hen. She was shapeless as a ball of fur; she clucked and stuttered—because her teeth never fitted her—and as the smiling novices hopped about her she was for ever waving her hands up and down in their faces as if she were wringing them together with the tips of her little fat hands. But now, as in her youth she had been a hen, in her years she was a wretched little chicken. Her clothes hung from her, she had developed a dropped eyelid, her cowl hung over the blind eye, and her voice was a pip-cough. When she fell asleep in the sun, with her bibulous coif, her breath coming in gusts through her mouth, her face red with sun and sleep, and her teeth sinking slowly down to her lower lip, she was a picture nobody in the convent cared to look at. She was become one of those supernumeraries, pensioners of religion,

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so to speak, that you find in every convent and whose doings are a constant worry to their House. She was come to that stage when the new Reverend Mother—the third since her day—began to conspire with the sisters against her as she had in her time conspired against the pensioners above in the graveyard.

Daily they gossiped about her, looking over their shoulders lest she should come on them unawares ; they said, nodding many times over it, that she was a dear old soul, everyone in the convent knew that. Of course, we get old, and she can't help it, poor dear ; but, still, this latest habit of losing her false teeth was too much. Why, you might walk on them ! And Sister Eunice said that if she straightened Mother Matilda's coif once a day, she straightened it twenty times. And Sister Agnes whispered behind their backs that it was a pity she dropped tea on her gimp. And Sister Ignatius thrust in her red, country face with the two buck-teeth, and cried that yesterday as she was walking by the oratory with Father Kennedy they almost fell over her legs, where she had them stretched out right in front of her like a man and she sitting on the grass-bank snoring like a trooper. They all laughed at that, but Mother John sighed impatiently and hushed them away to their tasks. They were no help to her.

Then as she stood in the damp, distempered hall and looked up at the portrait of their foundress her eye fell on the list of *Mothers of this House* framed beneath it. There was Matilda's name and two other names after it, and then, last of all, her own name, Mother John O'Connell. Matilda had inscribed that list herself, in a firm uncial hand with grotesque Celtic capitals. She had been drawing-mistress in her day and as the name Mother John O'Connell showed—clear and soft and flowing—inscribed only a few months ago,

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she had not yet lost her skill. That, Mother John noted, but she noted, too, with a little start of fright, the date beside the first name of all. In five years' time that house of the North Abbey would be seventy-five years in existence. At once she turned and went smiling in search of Matilda.

She found her telling her beads in a shady corner, sheltering from the summer sun and wind. She straightened her coif and holding her hand led the talk to the history of the Order. From their nook the city roofs fell into the valley, hung there in a swaying hammock of smoke. From the near backyards, with the shirts and shifts drying in the wind and the cries of the lane children and the mothers calling them at the top of their voices, that aerial plain narrowed out and up to the farthest smoke-rim beyond. There they could barely see another piece of churchyard calm, the second house of Saint John of the Cross—the South Abbey.

“Do you realise, Mother,” said Mother John, “that in five years’ time it will be the Jubilee of this House.”

“I do,” said Mother Matilda.

“We must begin to prepare for it,” said Mother John.

At the word “we” Matilda looked up with a faint hope; then she said humbly,

“Indeed, you must, Mother.”

Quickly John began to talk about Georgina Tinsely, their foundress, the wealthy and charitable spinster, whose people had made their money out of bad Kerry butter and lived, through the last century, in the North Abbey. That was her portrait in the hall, a sharp, long-jawed face, shadowed by its frilled coif. Mother John began to complain that in spite of the interdictions of generations of Reverend Mothers, the frame beneath was worn shapeless by “the lanes” about; “year after year,” she wailed, “they rub their dirty fingers on the wood. I caught a woman scraping off a piece of

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gilt the other day and blessing herself with it, as if it were Holy Water!"

"Ah, wisha, sure," soothed Matilda, "it's no wonder. She did great work for them."

"They don't do it in the South Abbey," said John, looking across at it.

"She didn't live in the South Abbey," said Matilda.

"She founded it," said John.

"Well, in a way she did," said Matilda, "but it was her sister gave her wealth to it."

There she began to trace the spread of the Order, as John wished her to, all over Ireland, recalling how a third house had been founded by a convert, how a parish-priest in Kinsale had asked for a fourth, because he wanted free schools for the soldiers' children, how a bishop gave land for a fifth near Cashel, and how the Order had prayed night and day when a law-suit was being fought to get money for a sixth.

"I often heard Mother Mary, God rest her," said Matilda, "tell about the Novenas they said that time. If we lost that case we'd be beggared for the next fifty years, aye, and longer!"

John looked at her—she was a bright old woman, yet, she thought. Yes, she could do it all right. And if she didn't, what harm was done.

"Mother Matilda," she ordered, and she straightened the dropped coif once more, "you shall write the history of the North Abbey and the Order. The book will be like the Book of Kells. It must be ready for the Jubilee, and every house in the country will see it and pride in it."

She rose and looked down smilingly at the old pensioner. Matilda, like an old cat rejoicing in a sudden wave of sunshine, had stuck out her tongue between her teeth and was gazing far over the city at the hills beyond. She clapped

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her little hands and waved the tiny sausages of fingers—dainty chippolatas of fingers—up and down in the air. Then her hands fell and she sighed.

“I'll begin it, mother. But I'll never live to see the Jubilee, mind you.”

“You'll live to see the Centenary,” laughed Mother John, as she raced away, delighted with her plan.

II

For the first couple of years Matilda did quite well at the History. She got a huge vellum book made, bound in tooled leather, a book so huge and heavy that she always had to have a novice by her to lift and move it. (This was part of Mother John's cunning—it gave her an excellent excuse for putting a warder over the old nun.) With the most perdurable inks, of scarlet and violet and gallblack, with Chinese white and tiny drops of gold, Matilda framed each small block of handwriting. She would spend a month tracing out the convolutions of the patterns in which she bedded her capitals, peering at them for hours through a magnifying glass held out by the trembling hand of the novice. She copied these designs from Irish manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the great period of manuscript illumination, and she expended so much patience in keeping her plant-like animals brilliant and glittering, after their long voyage through their own deformities, that by the time she had spent three years on the book and covered twenty years of history, there was not a convent of the Order that had not borrowed the unfinished manuscript, to show it to their sisters and patrons. Nobody cared now if she snored over her work, or if her coif fell on her neck, or if she mislaid her teeth. For she did all these things in the privacy of her cell, and if she escaped to do them

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elsewhere they could chide the novice to their hearts' content.

But then she grew ill and her eyes began to fail her, and she grew weary of her work. She had copied all the more interesting pieces of illumination she knew and she grew perverse and headstrong and began to invent designs for herself. But they were always the same kind of thing—vines twined about a trellis with bunches of purple grapes and great vine leaves wandering into the body of the text. By degrees she ceased to make capitals, and her round uncial declined into a ragged minuscule, from that into an angular running hand, and lastly into a childish type-script of her own. Worst of all there were several errors in spelling and the leaves were often smudged.

It grew so bad that by the time Mother Philamena succeeded Mother John the book could no longer be sent out of the North Abbey. They tried to suggest to her that she was tired and should allow somebody else to finish the book, for by now it had become, in their minds, a prized possession of the House. They would cluster over her as she worked, sighing at one another behind her back, while the novice stared at them all with a stony face, or looked at the old nun as one might look at a strange animal. Or they would hint that she needed more light; or one would lend her a ruler that was "nicer than her own"; or the more daring ones brought new pieces of illuminated work that they "thought she might like to get ideas from." She would just raise her fat face with the greying moustaches and smile her thanks and go on ruining the book.

With the approach of the Jubilee the last step was reached. She hurried and scurried over the page like a rabbit, scarcely seeing what she wrote. Her vines became almost leafless; their staffs sagged; the grapebunches were either meagre as

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pills or big as onions. She did not even notice if her sleeve suddenly swept a whole page into a mist. But that was not the worst of it. She talked of nothing but the Jubilee day. Clacking her teeth like an enraged monkey she would peer up suddenly at the novice through the thick lenses of her spectacles and cry :

“ I think we ought to exhibit it in the chapel ! ”

Then she would turn the half-filled page, with a stuttering, tremulous,

“ Where did I leave off ? What last ? What last ? ”

Or she would jump up and wrapping her glasses in her sleeve, hobble off to search out Mother Philamena.

“ The hall, Mother,” she would grin. “ That’s the best place. I just thought of it. In the hall ! Can I show it in the hall ? ”

Whereupon Philamena, who was a shrewish city woman with a cocked nose and a lisp, could see His Lordship stooping in amazement over the childish efforts of the old nun, or the visiting Mothers smiling sweetly at her and telling her what a great work the mother-house had done for the Order and how well they could understand now why the book was kept from them during the last three years. 

“ No, dear,” snapped Philamena—red to the summit of her nose—“ it is a very bad place. Do straighten your cowl, Mother, dear. What ? In the hall ? In everybody’s way. Sister Agnes ! ” (she calls out to a nun flitting by). “ You know, dear, you have no right to be . . . ”

So she leaves the old pensioner drooping like a broken plant, and that afternoon three separate sisters come privately to her to tell her that “ poor Mother Matilda is weeping all alone in the oratory and will not leave it for anybody.”

“ Why,” she implores Mother John (already sinking to the

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stage of pensioner herself) "why did you ever suggest to that poor soul to write a history?"

"Oh!" cries John. "Oh! How can you be so hard on the old dear. Why the whole convent knows she is a born saint. Please, Mother, let me tell her you *will* exhibit the book somewhere."

"Tell her anything you like," cried Philamena. "This Jubilee will be the death of me."

And before she could retract her promise, off went John to fetch the scribe and off went Philamena to conspire against the pair of them. From her office-window she could see them, a few minutes later, coming hand-in-hand down the rosary, Matilda shining like a moon, as she unwrapped her glasses to add a few more smudges and a few more monstrous grapes to her manuscript.

III

It was the Reverend Mother, as usual, that settled the problem of the book. If the book was finished they would have a lectern sent up from the North Cathedral. They would drape it in purple velvet. She could have candles about it and flowers. They would give her "the best room in the school, where everybody could see it in comfort."

The result was that the novice watched in terror while Matilda madly filled page after page, composing now as she went, making the most loving personal remarks about everybody in the convent, down to the new washer-woman, whose steam was even then rising from the basement.

"A most praiseworthy and Christian woman," read the novice over her shoulder. "She is married, we are informed on the best authority, to the most disgraceful . . ."

"Disgraceful?" popped Matilda back at the novice, while

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her hand made impatient circles over the page. "What else is he?"

"Mother, I don't know him!" wailed the novice.

"Oh! What else? What else? Disgraceful? What else could he be?"

Her hand raced on.

"... and disreputable drunkard of a man. She has ten children, she tells us, all by different husbands. But the hand of God has watched over her and lighted her a way out of the . . .

"The what?" she cries. "The what?"

"I don't know, Mother?"

"What do you get lit out of? What? What?"

". . . pit!" writes the hand.

"Pit of what?" she cries again. "Of what?"

". . . iniquity," writes the hand, while the novice groaned and began to tell her beads.

They finished the book so late on the eve of the Jubilee day that Matilda was too exhausted to question if anybody would ever come to the Geography Room to see her masterpiece. It was three storeys up, and all that evening they tramped up and down stairs, carrying flowers and candles, and bickering with other nuns who wanted the same flowers and candles for something else.

They barely had the room and the book prepared as the first guests arrived the following morning. The lawns were green after a providential night of showers and a morning of burning sun. The Chinese lanterns barely swayed on their strings and the tablecloths barely flapped a lazy wing under the jellies and the wines and the tea-cups and the cones of sweetcake. The little wind had cleared the city roofs of smoke and the clouds were building castles in the blue air. The two nuns, the old nun and the young novice, remained

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for hours watching the greens grow as black with priests as if a flock of crows had alighted there and were pecking on the lawn. They all had shiny tall-hats ; a neat circle of white cuff on every wrist ; here and there a warm piping of scarlet marked out a canon or a dean.

Then his lordship came with Mother Philamena on his right and her second-in-charge on his left, and the Mistress of Novices accompanied his secretary behind. As he passed through the crowd of clergy and lay people, he was like some giant walking through a field of rushes ; at every step they sank before him on a half-knee. Then he went indoors and the two nuns fluttered about their book and lit the candles and tipped the flowers. But he did not come to their room—and no priest came to their room, no, not through the livelong day, and nobody came until several hours after lunch, when Mother John managed to round up two giggling school-girls who looked and blushed at one another and were heard giggling louder than ever as soon as they got outside the door. John had tried hard (so she whispered to the novice), but Philamena had her cohorts so well deployed that it was impossible to get anybody even as far as the door of the school.

IV

Then, from their window-perch, the novice suddenly saw a friend of still earlier novitiate days entering with the Reverend Mother of the Kilcrea House. After being cooped up in that room all day, far from the fun and excitement below, her flesh weakened and she ran, ("Just for one minute, Mother, dear, you won't go away, will you, his lordship might come ?") to seek her. It was ten minutes, however, before she did find her, and then, hand in hand, under cover of their long sleeves, of course, the two young

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nuns went wandering under the lilacs by the gardener's shed, pressing one another's fingers, and smiling foolishly, as if they were both a little tipsy, and sometimes pausing to kiss when they recalled some particularly happy morning in Kilcrea. They were so full of joy that they lost all count of time.

Left to herself, Matilda blew out the candles and wandered down, painfully, step by step, to the main parlour, and from that to the guests' parlour, and so from room to room. One or two nuns, sitting there with friends, smiled at her coldly and she retired at once. Then she heard voices in the Common Room, and peeping in, she saw that it was filled with priests, standing or sitting about comfortably, sipping tea or wine or smoking cigarettes. There were two or three nuns there, but though they stared at her, she did not retire. With a little croak of joy she had spied old Father Mulligan in a far corner, a parish-priest she had known years ago, and she was beckoning to him and making noises like a bird to attract his attention.

At last somebody pointed her out to him and with delight he came forward and drew her in. He was a hearty, rude-faced man who had been given a small parish twenty years before in a village by the sea and he had never left it. Whiskers stood out of his ears and a kind of invading wilderness of white hair was stopped on each cheek by the razor. He was the only priest there smoking a pipe. He bowed over her and flattered her and they talked for a while about everybody they knew—though it was one long litany of God-rest-them!—until his curate came by them and he was led forward to meet the old nun.

“The oldest sister in the House,” coughed Father Mulligan.

“Interesting!” murmured the curate humbly. “It should be commemorated. The doyen of the House.”

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The next thing Matilda knew was a sudden fall in the clamour of talk about her and they were all listening to old Father Mulligan calling on them to drink "in wine, whisky, or good strong tay" the health of the doyen of the North Abbey.

"And she's still at work, I may say. She has completed the History of the Order of Saint John of the Cross."

"History?" one or two murmured with interest.

"Illuminated like the Book of Kells," palpitated Matilda. "It's on exhibition in the Geography Room, and I wish you'd all come and see it."

"Let's all go and see it," said Father Mulligan, while the three nuns looked at one another in horror.

"This way," piped Matilda, turning round and round like a peg-top, unable, in her excitement, to find the door.

But then she clapped her hands to her mouth and stared around at them in fright.

"What's wrong, Mother?" asked the curate in his miserable, too-humble voice.

"My teeth," wailed Matilda. I've lost my teeth. I think I had them in my hand when I came into the Common Room."

"Let's find them," cried a merry little man with a bush of curly hair.

He had drunk just a shade too much Beaune in the wine-tent.

"A search! A search!" he cried.

Whereupon they all began to wave their hands in the air and lift cushions and flower-pots, and stooping, they raised their behinds before armchairs and peeped under settees, and they opened cupboards that they should not have opened, while the three nuns fled for Philamena and her cohorts,

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and above all for the wretched novice who had allowed Matilda to escape.

“Lost ! A row of delf !” cried curly-mop.

“Aurora’s pearls,” said the classical scholar.

“Upper or lower ?” teased Father Mulligan, while Matilda in a corner felt herself all over.

The fun and scurry was at its height when his lordship entered, ushered in by Philamena’s second-in-charge.

“Oh, my !” he said in his gentle country brogue that broke every word into an iambic sigh. “O-oh ! m-my !”

“It’s Mother Matilda,” explained Father Mulligan’s curate in a sad voice, dropping his cigarette behind him where a friend deftly crushed it under his toe. “She has mislaid her denture,” he went on, and he said it like a naughty schoolboy, looking up at the bishop under his fair eyebrows.

“Oh, my !” groaned his lordship sympathetically.

“And who,” he croaked in his graveyard voice, that with time had become gentle and slow, because nobody had ever dared to interrupt him, “who may Mother Matilda be ?”

“She is Father Mulligan’s friend,” said the curate wickedly, as if he were saying, “It’s poor old Mulligan at it again, milord.”

But Father Mulligan did not mind. He led her forward.

“The oldest sister of the order,” he said. “The doyen of the Abbey.”

Matilda dropped on her two knees and kissed the extended ruby, once, twice, three times.

“Once for a man,” murmured the curate under his breath, “twice for a woman, three times for a fool.”

“Well, well !” smiled his lordship, and the first “well” was up in a tree, and the second “well” was as deep as a well. “Well, well !”

“Give me your blessing, your lordship,” pleaded Matilda.

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His hand wavered it over her crooked coif. The priests gathered near, away from the wine-glasses, and watched with interest.

"I hope, my child," smiled the bishop, "that you will have many, more, long, and happy years."

The face of Philamena appeared in the door, behind it a bunch of dismayed faces peeping over her shoulder.

"Dear Mother Matilda," greeted Philamena, coming forward. "I hear Sister Kieran left you. It was naughty of her."

She smiled at the bishop and led Kieran forward.

"Sister Kieran wants to show you a pigeon's egg," she went on to Matilda.

The round face of the little novice was pale as a mushroom.

"A lovely little pigeon's blue and white spotted egg," she babbled, "such a lovely little egg, come and see it."

Matilda looked blankly at her.

"Go," croaked his lordship, and he smilingly patted Matilda's arm, "go and see the pigeon's EGG!"

"It's green with blue spots on it," said the novice eagerly
"It's marvellous! It's lovely!"

She led her charge out and away down the corridor. She almost dragged her in her haste.

"But my teeth," wailed Matilda, stumbling after her.
"And the book."

"In the Geography Room," said Kieran. "You left them there, maybe."

"The book?" wailed Matilda. "They are coming to see the book."

"You left that in the Geography Room, too. We must light the candles. Hurry. Hurry."

Matilda was panting before she reached the room. While Kieran lit the candles she drew her breath at the window.

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From there she saw the bishop go out into the garden and then down the alley to the main gate. The priests, like cockchafers, flowed in his wake. Matilda said nothing, but her coif slewed after them as they passed out of sight.

The rumble of the evening of the city came to her, and near at hand a mother calling loudly to her child. A gentle mist was beginning to fall and Matilda lost herself in gazing out through that shimmer of haze. The novice was looking at a candle, and her eyes were soft and her mouth trembling.

“He’s a lovely priest,” said Matilda suddenly. “And he gave me his blessing. But,” she gulped, “he never saw the book.”

Suddenly she noticed the tears in the novice’s eyes.

“Never mind, dear. We’ll show the book another day,” encouraged the old nun.

“It isn’t that,” wept the novice, who was thinking of her little friend in Kilcrea. “But Sister Mary Michael is—is—is as thin as a latch.”

And she wept openly at the thought that her friend might die.

For a moment Matilda tried to understand, but then she began to pick at her one tooth. Her eyes, once more enlarged with her own small grief, went grey with the light of the falling rain.

“Ja-a-a-anie!” screamed the mother below in the lane. “Come ho-o-a-ame! I’ll give you lamb-and-sally when I ca-a-a-atch yeh!”

In the School-room below a clock ticked heavily and they heard, far away, the rumble of the town. One by one the novice extinguished the candles and led the old nun away, to the babble of the refectory for her supper. As she had not found her teeth, however, she could eat nothing; so she spent the whole hour looking about her and listening vacantly to the nuns talking of the excitement of the day.

MARGARET IRWIN

In Church

I

MRS. LACEY and her eldest daughter Alice hurried through the diminutive gate that led from the Rectory garden into the churchyard. Alice paused to call, "Jane, Father's gone on," under the window of her young sister's room. To her mother, she added with a cluck of annoyance, "What a time she takes to dress!" But Jane was sitting, ready dressed for church, in the window seat of her room. Close up to her window and a little to the right, stood the square church tower with gargoyles at each corner. She could see them every morning as she lay in her bed at the left of the window, their monstrous necks stretched out as though they were trying to get into her room.

The church bell stopped. Jane could hear the shuffle of feet as the congregation rose at the entrance of her father; then came silence, and then the drone of the General Confession. She jumped up, ran downstairs and into the churchyard. Right above her now hung the gargoyles, peering down at her. Behind them the sun was setting in clouds, soft and humid as winter sunsets can only be in

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Somerset. She was standing in front of a tiny door studded with nails. The doorway was the oldest part of the church of Cloud Martin. It dated back to Saxon days ; and the shrivelled bits of blackened, leather-like stuff, still clinging to some of the nails, were said to be the skins of heretics flayed alive.

Jane paused a moment, her hands held outwards and a little behind her. Her face was paler than it had been in her room, her eyes were half-shut, and her breath came a little quickly, but then she had been running. With the same sudden movement that she had jumped from the window-seat, she now jerked her hands forward, turned the great iron ring that served as a door handle, and stole into the church.

The door opened into the corner just behind the Rectory pew. She was late. Mrs. Lacey and Alice were standing up and chanting the monotone that had become a habitual and almost an unconscious part of their lives. Jane stole in past her mother, and knelt for an instant, her red pig-tail, bright symbol of an old-fashioned upbringing, flopping sideways on to the dark wood. “Please God, don’t let me be afraid—don’t, don’t, *don’t* let me be afraid,” she whispered ; then stood, and repeated the responses in clear and precise tones, her eyes fixed on the long stone figure of the Crusader against the wall in front of her.

He was in chain armour ; the mesh of mail surrounded his face like the coif of a nun, and a high crown-like helmet came low down on his brows. His feet rested against a small lion, which Jane as a child had always thought was his favourite dog that had followed him to the Holy Wars. His huge mailed hand grasped the pommel of his sword, drawn an inch or two from its scabbard. Jane gazed at him as though she would draw into herself all the watchful

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stern repose of the sleeping giant. Behind the words of the responses, other words repeated themselves in her mind.

“The knight is dust,
His good sword rust,
His soul is with the saints we trust.”

“But he is *here*,” she told herself, “you can’t really be afraid with him here.”

There came the sudden silence before the hymn, and she wondered what nonsense she had been talking to herself. She knew the words of the service too well, that was what it was ; how could she ever attend to them ?

They settled down for the sermon, a safe twenty minutes at least, in the Rector’s remote and dreamlike voice. Jane’s mind raced off at a tangent, almost painfully agile, yet confined always somewhere between the walls of the church.

“You shouldn’t think of other things in church,” was a maxim that had been often repeated to her. In spite of it she thought of more other things in those two Sunday services than in the whole week between.

“What a lot of Other Things other people must have thought of too in this church,” she said to herself ; the thought shifted and changed a little ; “there are lots of Other Things in this church ; there are too many Other Things in this church.” Oh, she *mustn’t* say things like that to herself or she would begin to be afraid again—she was not afraid yet—of course, she was not afraid, there was nothing to be afraid of, and, if there were, the Crusader was before her, his hand on his sword, ready to draw it at need. And what need could there be ? Her mother was beside her, whose profile she could see without looking at it, *she* would never be disturbed, and by nothing.

But at that moment Mrs. Lacey shivered, and glanced behind her at the little door by which Jane had entered.

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Jane passed her fur to her, but Mrs. Lacey shook her head. Presently she looked round again, and kept her head turned for fully a minute. Jane watched her mother until the familiar home-trimmed hat turned again to the pulpit ; she wondered then if her mother would indeed never be disturbed, and by nothing.

She looked up at the crooked angel in the tiny window of mediaeval glass. His red halo was askew ; his oblique face had been a friend since her childhood. A little flat-nosed face in the carving round the pillar grinned back at her and all but winked.

“ How old are you ? ” asked Jane.

“ Six hundred years odd,” he replied.

“ Then you should know better than to wink in church, let alone always grinning.”

But he only sang to a ballad tune

“ Oh, if you’d seen as much as I,
It’s often you would wink.”

“ In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost——.”

Already ! *Now* they would soon be outside again, out of the church for a whole safe week. But they would have to go through that door first.

She waited anxiously till her father went up to the altar to give the blessing. After she was confirmed, she, too, would have to go up to the altar. She would have to go. Now her father was going. He took so long to get there, he seemed so much smaller and darker as he turned his back on the congregation ; it was really impossible sometimes to see that he had on a white surplice at all. What was he going to do up there at the altar, what was that gleaming pointed thing in his hand ? *Who* was that little dark man

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going up to the altar? Her fingers closed tight on her prayer book as the figure turned round.

“ You idiot, of course it’s Father! There, you can see it’s Father.”

She stared at the benevolent nut-cracker face, distinct enough now to her for all the obscurity of the chancel. How much taller he seemed now he had turned round. And of course, his surplice was white—quite white. What *had* she been seeing?

“ May the peace of God which passeth all understanding—.”

She wished she could kneel under the spell of those words for ever.

“ Oh yes,” said the little flat-nosed face as she rose from her knees, “ but you’d find it dull you know.” He was grinning atrociously.

The two Rectory girls filed out after their mother, who carefully fastened the last button on her glove before she opened the door, on which hung the skins of men that had been flayed alive. As she did so, she turned round, and looked behind her, but went out without stopping. Jane almost ran after her, and caught her arm. Mrs. Lacey was already taking off her gloves.

“ Were you looking round for Tom Elroy, Mother? ” asked Alice.

“ No, dear, not specially. I thought Tom or someone had come up to our door, but the church does echo so. I think there must be a draught from that door, but it’s funny, I only feel it just at the end of the Evening Service.”

“ You oughtn’t to sit at the end of the pew then, and with your rheumatism. Janey, you always come in last. Why don’t *you* sit at the end? ”

“ I won’t! ” snapped Jane.

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“Whatever’s the matter, Jane?” asked her mother.

“Why should I sit at the end of the pew? Why can’t we move out of that pew altogether? I only wish we would.”

Nobody paid any attention to this final piece of blasphemy, for they had reached the lighted hall of the Rectory by this time and were rapidly dispersing. Jane hung her coat and hat on the stand in the hall and went into the pantry to collect the cold meat and cheese. The maids were always out on Sunday evening. Alice was already making toast over the dining room fire; she looked up as the Rector entered, and remarked severely: “You shouldn’t quote Latin in your sermons, Father. Nobody in the church understands it.”

“Nobody understands my sermons,” said Mr. Lacey, “for nobody listens to them. So I may as well give myself the occasional pleasure of a Latin quotation, since only a dutiful daughter is likely to notice the lapse of manners. Alice, my dear, did I give out in church that next Friday is the last Confirmation class?”

“Friday!” cried Jane, in the doorway with the cheese. “Next Friday the last class? Then the Confirmation’s next week.”

“Of course it is, and high time, too,” said Alice, “seeing that you were sixteen last summer. Only servant girls get confirmed *after* sixteen.”

That settled it then. In a spirit of gloomy resignation Jane engulfed herself in an orange.

There were bright stars above the church tower when she went to bed. She kept her head turned away as she drew the curtains, so that she should not see the gargoyles stretching their necks towards her window.

* * *

Friday evening found Jane at the last Confirmation class, in the vestry, with her father and three farmers’ daughters,

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who talked in a curious mixture of broad Somerset and High School education, and knew the catechism a great deal better than Jane.

After they had left, she followed closely at her father's elbow into the church to remove the hymn books and other vestiges of the choir practice that had taken place just before the class. The lamp he carried made a little patch of light wherever they moved ; the outlying walls of darkness shifted, but pressed hard upon it from different quarters. The Rector was looking for his Plotinus, which he was certain he had put down somewhere in the church. He fumbled all over the Rectory pew while Jane tried on vain pretexts to drag him away.

"I have looked in that corner—thoroughly," she said.

The Rector sighed.

"‘What shall I say
Since Truth is dead?’”

he inquired. "So far from looking in that corner, Jane, you kept your head turned resolutely away from it."

"Did I? I suppose I was looking at the list of Rectors. What a long one it is, and all dead but you, Father."

He at once forgot Plotinus and left the Rectory pew to pore with proud pleasure over the names that began with one Johannes de Martigny and ended with his own.

"A remarkably persistent list. Only two real gaps—in the Civil Wars and in the 14th century. That was at the time of the Black Death, when there was no rector of this parish for many years. You see, Jane?—1349, and then there's no name till 1361—Giraldus atte Welle. Do you remember when you were a little girl, very proud of knowing how to read, how you read through all the names to me, but refused to say that one? You said, 'It is a dreadful name,' and when I pressed you, you began to cry."

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“How silly! There’s nothing dreadful in Giraldus atte Welle,” began Jane, but as she spoke she looked round her. She caught at the Rector’s arm. “Father, there isn’t anyone in the church besides us, is there?”

“My dear child, of course, not. What’s the matter? You’re not nervous, are you?”

“No, not really. But we can find the Plotinus much easier by daylight. Oh—and Father—don’t let’s go out by the little door. Let’s pretend we’re the General Congregation and go out properly by the big door.”

She pulled him down the aisle, talking all the way until they were both in his study. “Father doesn’t *know*,” she said to herself—“he knows less than Mother. It’s funny, when he would understand so much more.”

But he understood that she was troubled. He asked: “Don’t you want to get confirmed, Jane?” and then—“You mustn’t be if you don’t want it.”

Jane grew frightened. There would be a great fuss if she backed out of it now after the very last class. Besides, there was the Crusader. Vague ideas of the initiation rites of knight and crusader crossed her mind in connection with the rite of confirmation. He had spent a night’s vigil in a church, perhaps in this very church. One could never fear anything else after that. If only she didn’t have to go right up to the altar at the Communion Service. But she would not think of that; she told the Rector that it was quite all right really, and at this moment they reached the hall door and met Mrs. Lacey hurrying towards them with a letter from Hugh, now at Oxford, who was coming home for the vacation on Wednesday.

“He asks if he may bring an undergraduate friend for the first few days—a Mr. York who is interested in old churches and Hugh thinks he would like to see ours. He must be

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clever—it is such a pity Elizabeth is away—she is the only one who could talk to him ; of course, he will enjoy talking with your Father, dear, but men seem to expect girls too to be clever now. And just as Janey's confirmation is coming on—she isn't taking it seriously enough as it is.”

“ *Mother!* Don't you want us to play dumb crambo like the last time Hugh brought friends down ? ”

“ Nonsense,” said the Rector hastily. “ Dumb crambo requires so much attention that it should promote seriousness in all things. I am very glad the young man is coming, my love, and I will try my hardest to talk as cleverly as Elizabeth.”

He went upstairs with his wife, and said in a low voice : “ I think Jane is worrying rather too much about her Confirmation as it is. She seems quite jumpy sometimes.”

“ Oh—jumpy—yes,” said Mrs. Lacey, as though she refused to consider jumpiness the right qualification for confirmation. The question of the curtains in the spare room, however, proved more immediately absorbing.

* * *

Hugh, who preferred people to talk shop, introduced his friend's hobby the first evening at dinner. “ He goes grubbing over churches with a pencil and a bit of paper and finds things scratched on the walls and takes rubbings of them and you call them graffiti. Now, then, Father, any offers from our particular property ? ”

The Rector did not know of any specimens in his church. He asked what sort of things were scratched on the walls.

“ Oh, anything,” said York, “ texts, scraps of dog Latin, aphorisms—once I found the beginning of a love song. When a monk, or anyone who was doing a job in the church,

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got bored, he'd begin to scratch words on the wall just as one does on a seat or log or anything to-day. Only we nearly always write our names and they hardly ever did."

He showed some of the rubbings he had taken. Often, he explained, you couldn't see anything but a few vague scratches, and then in the rubbing they came out much clearer. "The bottom of a pillar is a good place to look," he said, "and corners—anywhere where they're not likely to be too plainly seen."

"There are some marks on the wall near our pew," said Jane. "Low down, nearly on the ground."

He looked at her, pleased, and distinguishing her consciously for the first time from her rather sharp-voiced sister. He saw a gawky girl whose grave, beautiful eyes were marred by deep hollows under them, as though she did not sleep enough. And Jane looked back with satisfaction at a pleasantly ugly, wide, good-humoured face.

She showed him the marks next morning, both squatting on their heels beside the wall. Hugh had strolled in with them, declaring that they were certain to find nothing better than names of the present choirboys, and had retired to the organ loft for an improvisation. York spread a piece of paper over the marks, and rubbed his pencil all over it, and asked polite questions about the church. Was it as haunted as it should be?

Jane, concerned for the honour of their church, replied that the villagers had sometimes seen lights in the windows at midnight; but York contemptuously dismissed that. "You'd hear as much of any old church." He pulled out an electric torch and switched it on to the wall.

"It's been cut in much more deeply at the top," he remarked; "I can read it even on the wall." He spelt out slowly: "'Nemo potest duobus dominis.' That's a text

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from the Vulgate. It means, 'No man can serve two masters'"

"And did the same man write the rest underneath, too?"

"No, I should think that was written much later, about the end of the 14th century. Hartley will tell me exactly. He's a friend of mine in the British Museum, and I send him the rubbings and he finds out all about them."

He examined the sentence on the paper by his torch, while Hugh's "improvisation" sent horrible cacophonies reeling through the church.

"Latin again, and jolly bad—Monkish Latin, you know. Can't make out that word. Oh!"

"Well?"

"It's an answer to the text above, I think. I say, this is the best find I've ever had. Look here, the first fellow wrote 'No man can serve two masters,' and then, about a century after, number two squats down and writes—well, as far as I can make it out, it's like this: 'Show service therefore to the good, but cleave unto the evil.' Remarkable sentiment for a priest to leave in his church, for I'd imagine only the priest would be educated enough to write it. Now why did he say that, I wonder?"

"Because evil is more interesting than good," murmured Jane.

"Hmph. You agree with him then? What kind of evil?"

"I don't know. It's just—don't you know how words and sentences stick in your head sometimes? It's as though I were always hearing it."

"Do you think you'll hear it to-morrow?" asked York, maliciously. He had been told that to-morrow was the day of her confirmation. She tried to jump up, but as she was cramped from squatting so long on her heels she only sat down instead, and they both burst out laughing.

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"I'm sorry," said York, "I didn't mean to be offensive. But I'd like to know what's bothering you."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know. But never mind. I daresay you can't say."

This at once caused an unusual flow of speech from Jane.

"Why should evil be interesting?" she gasped. "It isn't in real life—when the servants steal the spoons and the villagers quarrel with their neighbours. Mrs. Elroy came round to Father in a fearful stew the other day because old Mrs. Croft had made a maukin of her."

"A what?"

"An image—you know—out of clay, and she was sticking pins in it and Mrs. Elroy declared she knew every time a pin had gone in because she felt a stab right through her body."

"What did your Father say?"

"He said it was sciatica, but she wouldn't believe it, and he had to go round to Mrs. Croft and talk about Christmas peace and goodwill, but she only leered and yammered at him in the awful way she does, and then Alice said that Christmas blessings only come to those who live at peace with their neighbours, and Mrs. Croft knew that blessings meant puddings, so she took the pins out and let the maukin be, and Mrs. Elroy hasn't felt any more stabs."

"Mrs. Croft is a proper witch then?"

York stood up, looking rather curiously at her shining eyes.

"Cloud Martin has always been a terrible bad parish for witches," said Jane, proudly.

"You find *that* form of evil interesting," he said.

Jane was puzzled and abashed by his tone. She peered at the wall again and thought she could make out another mark underneath the others. York quickly took a rubbing and,

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examining the paper, found it to be one word only, and probably of the same date as the last sentence, which had caused so much discussion about evil.

“‘Ma-ma,’ ah, I have it. ‘Maneo’—‘I remain,’ that’s all.”

“‘I remain?’ Who remains?”

“Why the same ‘I’ who advises us to cleave to evil. Remembering, perhaps, though it hadn’t been said then, that the evil that men do lives after them.”

She looked at him with startled eyes. He thought she was a nice child but took things too seriously.

Hugh’s attempts at jazz on the organ had faded away. As Jane and York left the church by the little door, they met him coming out through the vestry.

“Lots of luck,” said York, handing him the paper. “Did you turn on the verger or anyone to look as well?”

“No—why? Aren’t the family enough for you?”

“Rather. I was only wondering what that little man was doing by the door as we went out. You must have seen him, too,” he said, turning to Jane, “he was quite close to us.”

But as she stared at him, he wished he had not spoken.

“Must have been the organist,” said Hugh, who was looking back at the church tower. “Do you like gargoyles, York? There’s rather a pretty one up there of a devil eating a child—see it?”

* * *

On the Sunday morning after the Confirmation, the day of her first Communion, Jane rose early, dressed by candle-light, met her mother and sister in the hall, and followed them through the raw, uncertain darkness of the garden and churchyard. The chancel windows were lighted up; the

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gargoyles on the church tower could just be seen, their distorted shapes a deeper black against the dark sky.

Jane slipped past her mother at the end of the pew. Except for the lights in the chancel, and the one small lamp that hung over the middle aisle, the church was dark, and one could not see who was there. Mr. Lacey was already in the chancel, and the Service began. Jane had been to this Service before, but never when the morning was dark like this. Perhaps that was what made it so different. For it *was* different.

Her Father was doing such odd things up there at the altar. Why was he pacing backward and forward so often, and waving his hands in that funny way? And what *was* he saying? She couldn't make out the words—she must have completely lost the place. She tried to find it in her prayer book, but the words to which she was listening gave her no clue; she could not recognise them at all, and presently she realised that not only were the words unknown to her, but so was the language in which they were spoken. Alice's rebuke came back to her: "You shouldn't quote Latin in your sermons, Father." But this wasn't a sermon, it was the Communion Service. Only in the Roman Catholic Church would they have the Communion Service in Latin, and then it would be the Mass. Was Father holding Mass? He would be turned out of the Church for being Roman. It was bewildering, it was dreadful. But her mother didn't seem to notice anything.

Did she notice that there were other people up there at the altar?

There was a brief pause. People came out of the darkness behind her, and went up to the chancel. Mrs. Lacey slipped out of the pew and joined them. Jane sat back and let her sister go past her.

"You are coming, Janey?" whispered Alice, as she passed.

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Jane nodded, but she sat still. She had let her mother and sister leave her ; she stared at the two rows of dark figures standing in the chancel behind the row of those who knelt ; she could not see her mother and sister among them ; she could see no one whom she knew.

She dared not look again at the figures by the altar ; she kept her head bowed. The last time she had looked, there had been two others standing by her Father—that is, if that little dark figure had indeed been her Father. If she looked now, would she see him there ? Her head bent lower and sank into her hands. Instead of the one low voice murmuring the words of the Sacrament, a muffled chant of many voices came from the chancel.

She heard the shuffle of feet, but no steps came past her down into the church again. What were they doing up there ? At last she had to look, and she saw that the two rows were standing facing each other across the chancel, instead of each behind the other. She tried to distinguish their faces, to recognise even one that she knew. Presently she became aware that why she could not do this was because they had no faces. The figures all wore dark cloaks with hoods, and there were blank white spaces under the hoods.

“ It is possible,” she said to herself, “ that those are masks.” She formed the words in her mind deliberately and with precision as though to distract her attention ; for she felt in danger of screaming aloud with terror, and whatever happened she must not draw down on her the attention of those waiting figures. She knew now that they were waiting for her to go up to the altar.

She might slip out by the little door and escape, if only she dared to move. She stood up and saw the Crusader lying before her, armed, on guard, his sword half drawn from its scabbard. Her breath was choking her. “ Crusader, Cru-

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sader, rise and help me," she prayed very fast in her mind. But the Crusader stayed motionless. She must go out by herself. With a blind, rushing movement, she threw herself on to the little door, dragged it open, and got outside.

* * *

Mrs. Lacey and Alice thought that Jane, wishing for solitude, must have returned from the Communion table to some other pew. Only Mr. Lacey knew that she had not come up to the Communion table at all ; and it troubled him still more when she did not appear at breakfast. Alice thought she had gone for a walk ; Mrs. Lacey said in her vague, late Victorian way, that she thought it only natural Jane should wish to be alone for a little.

" I should say it was decidedly more natural that she should wish for sausages and coffee after being up for an hour on a raw December morning," said her husband with unusual asperity.

It was York who found her, half-an-hour later, walking very fast through the fields. He took her hands, which felt frozen, and as he looked into her face he said : " Look here, you know, this won't do. What are you so frightened of ? " And then broke off his questions, told her not to bother to try and speak, but to come back to breakfast, and half-pulled her with him through the thick, slimy mud, back to the Rectory. Suddenly she began to tell him that the Service that morning had all been different—the people, their clothes, even the language, it was all quite different.

He thought over what she stammered out, and wondered if she could somehow have had the power to go back in time, and see and hear the Latin Mass as it used to be in that church.

" The old Latin Mass wasn't a horrible thing, was it ? "

" Jane ! Your Father's daughter needn't ask that."

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“No. I see. Then it wasn’t the Mass I saw this morning—it was——” She spoke very low so that he could hardly catch the words. “There was something horrible going on up there by the altar—and they were waiting—waiting for me.”

Her hand trembled under his arm. He thrust it down into his pocket on the pretext of warming it. It seemed to him monstrous that this nice, straightforward little school-girl, whom he liked best of the family, should be hag-ridden like this.

That evening he wrote a long letter to his antiquarian friend, Hartley, enclosing the pencil rubbings he had taken of the words scratched on the wall by the Rectory pew.

On Monday he was leaving them, to go and look at other churches in Somerset. He looked hard at Jane as he said “good-bye.” She seemed to have completely forgotten whatever it was that had so distressed her the day before, and at breakfast had been the jolliest of the party. But when she felt York’s eyes upon her, the laughter died out of hers ; she said, but not as though she had intended to say it, “You will come back for Wednesday.”

“Why, what happens on Wednesday ?”

“It is full moon then.”

“That’s not this Wednesday then, it must be Wednesday week. Why do you want me to come back then ?”

She could give no answer to that. She turned self-conscious and began an out-of-date jazz song about “Wednesday week way down in old Bengal !”

It was plain she did not know why she had said it. But he promised himself that he would come back by then, and asked Mrs. Lacey if he might look them up again on his way home.

In the intervening ten days, he was able to piece together

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some surprising information from Hartley which seemed to throw a light on the inscriptions he had made at Cloud Martin.

In the reports of certain trials for sorcery in the year 1474, one Giraldus atte Welle, priest of the parish of Cloud Martin in Somerset, confessed under torture to having held the Black Mass in his church at midnight on the very altar where he administered the Blessed Sacrament on Sundays. This was generally done on Wednesday or Thursday, the chief days of the Witches' Sabbath when they happened to fall on the night of the full moon. The priest would then enter the church by the little side door, and from the darkness in the body of the church those villagers who had followed his example and sworn themselves to Satan, would come up and join him, one by one, hooded and masked, that none might recognise the other. He was charged with having secretly decoyed young children in order to kill them on the altar as a sacrifice to Satan, and he was finally charged with attempting to murder a young virgin for that purpose.

All the accused made free confessions towards the end of their trial, especially in as far as they implicated other people. All, however, were agreed on a certain strange incident. That just as the priest was about to cut the throat of the girl on the altar, the tomb of the Crusader opened, and the knight, who had lain there for two centuries, arose and came upon them with drawn sword, so that they scattered and fled through the church, leaving the girl unharmed on the altar.

With these reports from Hartley in his pocket, York travelled back on the Wednesday week by slow cross-country trains that managed to miss their connections and land him at Little Borridge, the station for Cloud Martin, at a quarter past ten. The village cab had broken down, there was no other car to be had at that hour, it was a six-mile walk up to the Rectory, there was a station hotel where it would be far

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more reasonable to spend the night, and finish his journey next morning. Yet York refused to consider this alternative ; all through the maddening and uncertain journey, he had kept saying to himself, "I shall be late," though he did not know for what. He had promised Jane he would be back this Wednesday, and back he must be. He left his luggage at the station and walked up. It was the night of the full moon, but the sky was covered with cloud as to be almost dark. Once or twice he missed his way in following the elaborate instructions of the station master, and had to retrace his steps a little. It was hard on twelve o'clock when at last he saw the square tower of Cloud Martin Church, a solid blackness against the flying clouds.

He walked up to the little gate into the churchyard. There was a faint light from the chancel windows, and he thought he heard voices chanting. He paused to listen, and then he was certain of it, for he could hear the silence when they stopped. It might have been a minute or five minutes later, that he heard the most terrible shriek he had ever imagined, though faint, coming as it did from the closed church ; and knew it for Jane's voice. He ran up to the little door and heard that scream again and again. As he broke through the door he heard it cry, "Crusader ! Crusader !" The church was in utter darkness, there was no light in the chancel, he had to fumble in his pockets for his electric torch. The screams had stopped and the whole place was silent. He flashed his torch right and left, and saw a figure lying huddled against the altar. He knew that it was Jane ; in an instant he had reached her. Her eyes were open, looking at him, but they did not know him, and she did not seem to understand him when he spoke. In a strange, rough accent of broad Somerset, that he could scarcely distinguish, she said : "It was my body on the altar."

Mary Ansell

MARY BRAKEFIELD, wife of Samuel Brakefield, landlord of the "Golden Lion," Netherhinton, made her way along the accustomed hedge-bordered road that led to the foot of the downs. From the road-end the coarse grass of the downs rose in a single abrupt slope to the flat summit which was enclosed by a great rampart, rising nobly from its broad ditch. The face of this ancient earthwork was so steep that he who climbed it could do so only on his knees, pulling himself up with his hands by the strong tufted grass that clothed it like a shaggy fur. Every Thursday Mary Brakefield took the same walk and always alone. She was a quiet, kindly, respectable woman, not otherwise eccentric, and her husband and the neighbours, though they themselves never took a walk except when some definite object required, had long since grown so accustomed to this weekly stroll of hers that they had ceased to regard it as strange, even when the weather was so stormy that it was incredible that anyone should walk out, much less climb the bare downs, for mere pleasure. On winter evenings, when, looking from their cottage windows into a stormy twilight, the villagers saw a lonely figure struggling against wind and rain down the long village street, they would say without

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surprise : “ It’ll only be Mrs. Brakefield coming back from her walk.”

She was a spare, neat woman of forty, though strangers put her age down at over fifty. Her face was pale and bony, the eyes, too, pale and weary and red-rimmed ; and the corners of her mouth had a bitter downward droop that on rare occasions vanished suddenly and surprisingly into a charming, wistful smile.

It was the beginning of October, and the hedges between which she walked had kindled from the dusty green of summer into long lines of scarlet and yellow flame that danced and flickered against the sagging grey sky in the breeze that flowed through them. All her life she had known that road and the downs that rose at the end of it, and, beyond them, the wide plains of the sea into which the downs dropped—a sheer fall of eight hundred feet—in scooped precipices of white or rosy chalk. For she was a native of Netherhinton, and had never been further east of it than Bournemouth, further west than Weymouth, or further north than Dorchester. She came of poor parents. Her father had been a farm-labourer and her mother the daughter of a labourer, and it had been thought a great piece of luck for her to marry the landlord of the “ Golden Lion.” She walked on at a brisk pace, looking neither to right nor left, nor even ahead of her : she walked, indeed, not at all as if walking for the mere sake of it, but as one on an errand, and when she reached the end of the road she began at once, without a pause or a glance about her, to climb the down by a sheep track that wavered steeply up it. Under the stress of the climb her pace became gradually slower and slower ; half-way up she paused breathless, and turned to survey with unseeing eyes the variegated fields below her, and, beyond them, the village

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thatches crouching under the yellowing elms and the gaunt grey fragment of Evesdon Castle, which Cromwell had blown up. As soon as she had breath enough, she continued her climb, and then, when she was almost at the top and had reached the earthwork, vanished over the long line of the ditch and, in half a minute, re-appeared, clambering on her hands and knees up the steep rampart. Soon she had crawled to the top and stood for a moment silhouetted against the sky, a minute vertical object, breaking the long horizontal lines of down and earthworks. Then again she disappeared.

The grassy area inside the rampart sloped slightly upwards to the sheer edge, so that from where she stood she saw nothing of the sea, but only the grey, laden sky. But she did not want to see the sea, for she knew that to-day it would be—not as it had been eighteen years ago to-day, blue and lustrous as an iris-petal, and, near the shore, paler and so clear that the ribs of chalky rock at the bottom were as visible as if seen through a flawless, pale blue crystal—but leaden-grey, desolate, chilling to the heart. So she did not go towards the cliff-edge, but followed the base of the rampart until it bent inwards at right angles and crossed the hilltop. There she stopped, and in the bend, as if in the corner of a roofless room, sat down. For a while she sat motionless, self-absorbed; then leaned back against the slope of the turf wall, turned on her left side and closed her eyes.

And soon she knew that he was there, the Jim Ansell of eighteen years ago. She felt no human touch, no warmth, and his voice had no sound, but he was present to her and she could speak to him, not with her lips, not aloud, for there was no need to speak aloud, but in her heart with a speech much more real, much more close, than the cold

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audible speech she exchanged with her husband and neighbours and the tourists that came to the inn. And in that unworldly, spiritual speech he answered her. With her eyes and all her senses closed and his visible absence shut out and forgotten, she lay in his arms, felt her body wrapped, safe and sound, in his body, the warmth of his face against hers, the smell, like heather and seaweed, of his khaki jacket. She was alive once more, escaped from the death of her present existence into the warm life of her early days. That life was so real to her that whenever she reached their meeting-place and lay back and closed her eyes, her actual self ceased to exist and she had never once thought it strange that a tired, faded woman of forty should lie in the arms of this dark-haired young man of twenty-two, nor had she ever told herself that their child, if it had lived, would by now have been a boy only five years younger than his father, or that, just as there was another Mary, the faded Mary of to-day, so there was another Jim Ansell, withered and eyeless, lying in some unknown cemetery in France. Such thoughts never came to her, for he and she met in a timeless and unchanging world which belonged to them alone. This angle in the earthwork was especially theirs, but they met in other places, too, for she carried their secret world within her and could drop back into it whenever opportunity occurred. When she was alone at the inn, working in the kitchen or sitting, darning, in the little private parlour, she would often leave her patient body to get on with its work, and would step across the threshold ; and at night, the moment the candle had been blown out and she had lain down in bed with Sam, she would be gone, abandoning to her husband the tired, obedient Mary Brakefield, like a corpse laid out, hurrying back to her real life and Jim.

But sometimes, when she was very tired, she had not

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the strength to escape. The outer world—Sam Brakefield, the inn, the neighbours—was too strong for her. She was too feeble, by herself, to support and preserve the world of her desires. If only there had been someone else who knew of it and recognised its reality, who would speak of Jim, who would, perhaps, call her not Mrs. Brakefield but Mrs. Ansell, what a help and what a comfort it would be. But there was no one; her secret was unshared. That name, Mary Ansell, which she had never borne in real life, was the name by which she thought of herself. She had actually written it in the few books which Jim's aunt had left her at her death fourteen years ago. It was safe to do so, for Mary Ansell was the name of Jim's aunt, and if Sam had ever noticed it he would not have been surprised. Mrs. Ansell had left her not only the books but also Jim's scroll, neatly framed—the scroll that had been sent to her as Jim's next-of-kin after he had been killed. But Sam, as far as Mary knew, had never looked into the books. He had shown no surprise when they and the scroll had been brought to his wife, for he had known that she and Mrs. Ansell were old friends. When she had opened the parcel he had lifted up the scroll and examined it. "It'll look nice on the wall," he had said, and had then asked: "Who was he?"

"Her nephew," Mary had answered, and she had put away the books in the hanging bookcase in the parlour and hung up the scroll there. Sam never sat in that room. In the summer, on those days when so many visitors called that there was no more space in the public room, some of them were served there, but for nine months in the year Mary had it to herself and she would sit there often to sew and darn. Seated there, near the books he must often have read and with his scroll before her eyes, she felt closer

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to him than anywhere else than in the earthwork. She often glanced at his name at the bottom of the scroll, Lance Corporal James Ansell, but she seldom read what went before it, for the last sentence—"Let those that come after see to it that his name be not forgotten"—spoke too painfully of his absence, made of him a name only, a name threatened with oblivion.

It was eighteen years ago, eighteen years this very day, that they had met for the last time. On the last day of his leave from France they had climbed the downs together, scrambled up the earthwork and walked to the edge of the cliff. He had laughed when she had clutched at his sleeve to stop him going too near the brink. The whole immense depth of air below them and the huge expanse of sea sparkled with sunshine. Out near the horizon a ship—an English battleship—drew a long, gauzy trail of smoke after it. Jim pointed to the horizon. "You'd never think, would you," he said, "that thousands of chaps were in the thick of it, just over there?"

"Don't," she said. "Don't think of it. I don't want to think of it till"

"Till I'm there?"

She nodded, and they turned away from the cliff and walked across to the angle of the rampart. There they lay down, his arms round her. "Then you'll *wait* for me," he whispered, half jokingly. "Only a few months, till my *next* leave. Then we'll get married."

She pressed her cheek against his. "I don't have to wait," she said, her heart suddenly full. "I'm your's already."

For a while he did not speak. Then he said: "Yes, you're mine, Mary, and I'm your's. Only we've got to wait till next leave to be married."

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She shook her head. "We're married already."

Again he paused, as if thinking. Then he said: "But . . . but suppose I was to stop one?"

"Stop one?"

"Stop a shell or a bullet. Get knocked out."

She put her hand over his mouth. "Don't. Don't say such things."

"But it might happen," he said, when she had freed his mouth.

"That means we mustn't wait."

"But, think, Mary, what might happen—to you, I mean."

"I'm thinking," she said. "That's why I say we mustn't wait."

It was already dark when they walked home together and parted outside the gate of her home.

A week later, before she had received any letter from him, she was passing his aunt's cottage and Mrs. Ansell called to her from the door. Mary went to her and she led her into the little front room, paused to shut the door, then turned on the girl a face woefully transformed. "Mary," she said, "Jim's gone."

"Gone?" It was as if lightning had struck her. She felt it leap from her head to her heels.

"Killed," said Mrs. Ansell.

* * *

When Mary knew she was to have a child she told her mother, weeping, as she spoke, not for shame, but for Jim. Her mother laid her arm round her shoulders. She spoke no word of rebuke and, though she spoke no word of comfort either, Mary knew that she understood and sympathised. "I shall have to tell your father," was all she said.

"Will he be angry?" Mary asked.

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“Yes,” said the old woman, “but I’ll manage him. You keep out of his way and say nothing.”

Mary never knew of the encounter between her mother and father, nor that her father had wished to turn her out-of-doors and had resigned himself only when her mother had told him that, if Mary went, she would go with her. She knew only that after that her father never spoke to her, never took the least notice of her. Two months later her mother told her that she was to go to an aunt in Devonshire and stay there till after her baby was born. What was to happen after that she did not ask, but she was resolved that, come what might, she would never be separated from the child. But the child, a little boy, was stillborn, and three months after his birth Mary returned to her home. It seemed to her that her life was finished. In her absence a new landlord had come to the “Golden Lion.” He was a bachelor, and her mother now worked at the inn, scrubbing floors and washing up mugs and glasses. Soon after her return, her mother came home with the news that Mr. Brakefield wanted a handy girl to help in the bar and that she had mentioned Mary to him. A few days later Mary began her work at the inn.

Sam Brakefield was a good master to her and her mother. He was an easy-going, kindly man, ten years older than Mary. At the end of a year, to her amazement and horror, he asked her to marry him. Ashen-faced and with a trembling lip she refused, but he waved aside her refusal. “You think it over, my dear,” he said. “I don’t want to hurry you. Think it over and see what your mother says.”

Her mother, when Mary spoke of it, pressed her to accept Brakefield. “You must think of the future, my dearie,” she said. “When your father and I are gone you’ll have no home. You’ll have to toil and moil, perhaps for a hard

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master or mistress. Mr. Brakefield's honest and he's kind. He'll be a good husband to you, Mary. Take him. It'll be a comfort to me to know you're well provided for."

"But I can't ever forget Jim," said Mary.

"You don't have to forget him. Keep him to yourself, that's all, and act fairly by your husband."

"But mustn't I tell him . . . ?"

"About Jim ?"

"About the child ?"

"No. There's no call to tell him. No one here knows about it, and never will."

A month later Mary became Mrs. Brakefield.

* * *

It was getting dark when Mary Brakefield opened her eyes and found herself alone under the sky in the angle of the rampart. Dazed and chilly she got to her feet. If she did not hurry she would never find the path down the steep slope. Already when she had climbed down the great turf wall and emerged from the ditch, the village below her was lost in the gloom of its elms, and by the time she had reached the foot of the down and struck into the road the last pale streaks in the west were closing into the darkness of a stormy sky. She felt desolate and tired by her long, lonely ecstasy. She clung to Jim, trying to keep him with her still, but he withdrew from her. Her spirit was too weak now to hold him, her attention too distracted by the need of keeping her path on the dark road. If only there was someone who knew, someone who would come towards her now, down this dark road, and as he passed her call out : "Good-night, Mrs. Ansell." Those few short words would be enough to keep her and Jim together. But the road was deserted and as she turned into the village large drops of rain began to fall.

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When she entered the inn her husband's voice greeted her. "Two gentlemen wanting tea, Mary. I've got the kettle on and shown them into the parlour, by the fire."

* * *

The two young men had walked all day. They had lunched off beer and bread and cheese at an inn twelve miles away, and had hoped to find another inn in the cove they had reached late in the afternoon. But no inn was there, and when they had asked for the nearest they had been directed to Netherhinton, four miles away. Now they sat, tired and contented in the little parlour of the "Golden Lion," one on each side of the fireplace, with their legs stretched to the warmth, waiting for the tea they had ordered.

When he had finished a cigarette, the more energetic of the two got out of his chair, and, with his hands in the pockets of his shorts, began prowling round the room, examining the pictures and photographs. When he had reached the bookcase he called out to his friend: "I say, Guy, here's *The Return of the Native*, and *Jude*, and *Lorna Doone*, and the *Bible*, and *Pickwick*. Not a bad lot for a village inn."

He took down *Jude the Obscure*, opened the cover and read "Mary Ansell, 1919." *Pickwick* revealed the same name, and then he was interrupted by the opening of the door. A thin-faced woman brought in their tea on a tray. The young man, caught with *Pickwick* in his hand, spoke to her! "I've found a nice lot of books here," he said. "Are they yours?"

The pale, red-rimmed eyes met his. "Yes, Sir," she said, in her tired, toneless voice, "they're all mine."

She set the tea on the table. "Just ring the bell if you want anything, gentlemen," she said as she went quietly out.

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They thanked her, and the other young man rose from his chair and went over to where his friend was standing. "What's this?" he said, bending his head to inspect Jim's scroll.

"Some poor devil that was killed in the War," said the first, and he read: "Lance Corporal James Ansell."

"Her son, I expect," said the other, as they sat down to their tea.

When they had finished they rang for their bill and the thin-faced woman returned. How far was it, they asked, to Wareham?

Six miles, she told them; and there was a bus in twenty minutes' time, if they were tired of walking.

"Good! Then, if you don't mind, we'll sit here till it comes."

"Certainly, Sir," she said, without raising her eyes from the tray on which she was piling the used tea-things.

"Not exactly a cheerful specimen, is she?" said one to the other, as they returned to their chairs beside the fire.

Five minutes before the time for the bus they slung their knapsacks on their backs and went out of the room. As they passed the kitchen door it was ajar, and the first young man called out a goodnight as he passed. "Goodnight, Mrs. Ansell," he called.

She was standing at the kitchen table, her pale eyes cast down, her mouth drooping bitterly at the corners, preparing supper for herself and her husband; but at the sound of the young man's voice her face bloomed suddenly as if kindled by some inner, spiritual light, and her mouth, its bitterness gone, took on the charming, wistful smile of a young girl.

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Conversion

WHEN I read Peregrine Willard's new novel I must confess I was surprised.

Young Peregrine's literary reputation, though rather of the precious kind, was by no means to be sneered at. He has always been spoken of as "the brilliant" rather than as "a rising" young novelist, and you must agree the difference is considerable. Then he is tall and rather broodingly dark, which helps ; and he wears a fine black beard. He is, too—or was before this last book of his—the darling of a certain by no means stupid literary clique. He can write, you know ; he is well reviewed, always in the intelligent and sometimes even in the popular papers. But in these latter journals, his reviewers have been wont to lament his one-sided, his unbalanced, view of life, for Peregrine belongs—or belonged before this last book—to the every-prospect-pleases-but-man-is-vile school of thought. It was his habit to write ironic little masterpieces, brief, beautiful, but bitter books showing, with real power and in lovely English, the general repulsiveness of humanity, how little hope there is for it and how much meanness occurs in even its best specimens ; all this against an exquisitely painted background.

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His latest novel, the one of which I began by speaking, opened in the same way, inducing in the reader a contempt (according to Peregrine, of course, a salutary contempt) for everybody and everything, and making one suspect every butcher's boy and tram conductor (perhaps justly) of the darkest sexual perversions.

And then in the middle there was a sudden change. It was not that Peregrine dimmed his former piercing insight by donning rose-coloured spectacles ; his vision was just as unblinking, his descriptions as sardonically accurate, as ever ; but a note of hope seemed somehow to creep into his account of what he saw. It was as though, mixed up with all the vileness and meanness, the filth, the egoistic motive, which Peregrine saw so abundantly about him, he had discovered one or two—I won't say one or two white flowers of blameless lives, for that would be going altogether too far : where could one hope to find a life blameless throughout ?—but one or two generous impulses, one or two motives and actions which deserved respect. To my mind his work gained immeasurably from this realisation on the writer's part that there are two elements in human nature, two motives in life, of which self is only one. Inextricably mingled these elements may be, doubtful their relative value may be, but two there are in each human being ; and to deny this in favour of either element, or romantically to allot one element to one person and another to another in the old hero-villain style, is to deny an eternal truth, shirk the real problem of life, and—to descend to a lower level—prevent oneself from achieving first rank in any art.

I reviewed Peregrine's book on these lines at some length, and amused myself by pointing out the precise page on which I imagined I had discovered the change in his philosophy to have taken place.

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The morning the notice appeared he rang me up.

“ You’re a better critic than I thought,” he began.

“ Thank you for nothing,” I said, not too pleased.

“ You’ve more penetration than I gave you credit for,” he went on, with a note in his voice, as though he believed himself to be saying something handsome, which I admit annoyed me.

“ That doesn’t do *your* penetration much credit,” said I.

“ What? Oh, I see,” he said, and laughed. “ Well!” He paused.

I thought I saw that he had rung me up to talk, not about my criticism, but about his novel. “ Your changed point of view—is there a story behind it, as journalists say?” I asked.

“ More and more penetration!” he replied. “ There is.”

“ Then come round and tell it me at once,” I said. “ It’s the only apology I shall accept for your disparaging remarks on my critical powers.”

He laughed and rang off without replying; but an hour or two later turned up for lunch, and after a display of diffidence which surprised me in such a very sophisticated (and very brilliant) young novelist, gave me an account of the whole affair.

It appeared that it became necessary, in the course of his novel, for his heroine to undergo a peculiarly shattering, hardening, disillusioning experience of some kind. As a matter of fact, said Peregrine, the whole novel had been planned and begun in order to give him the opportunity of describing a certain love affair which he had in mind, as this hardening and disillusioning experience; but when he came to the point of writing it, the love affair in question wouldn’t fit into the novel at all. I laughed a little at this, and Peregrine, after a scowl or two, laughed as well. “ Well, you know how it is,” he said with an apologetic air. I agreed

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feelingly that I knew very well. So some other hardening etc., experience had to be thought out. Peregrine tried one or two—of course these were laboratory secrets—but they did not work out to his satisfaction ; so eventually he decided to be very subtle and scathing about it, and harden his heroine by merely exposing her to the devastating dreariness of some typical scene of English life. Eventually he hit upon the original, and possibly rather clever notion of choosing an ordinary popular seaside resort for his dreary scene, and without saying anything to anybody, drove himself down to Ignotus-on-Sea for a fortnight.

From the first the place surpassed his expectations. He chose lodgings in a back street, with lace curtains, drawn very close, and a suitable number of aspidistras. The meals alone, he said, would have embittered the life of any young woman fit to be a heroine of his, but if they were not enough, across the road was a sort of stable-cum-garage, the proprietor of which was peculiarly disillusioning. The man was a great fat lump of flesh, with a very red face, curly grey hair—somehow its curliness was quite obscene, said Peregrine, “ and you needn’t suspect me of trying to work the adjective in, I assure you,”—and some defect in the formation of his huge red lips which made his speech a slobbering horror. Clad in an old tweed norfolk jacket, stained khaki breeches, cycling stockings and filthy white tennis shoes, this monstrosity was always stamping about his yard, shouting and swearing at his unfortunate mechanics, and browbeating the more timid of his customers. Peregrine he promptly cheated of half-a-crown of his change, besides giving him an oil inferior to the one he paid for. “ Very good,” said Peregrine to himself, crossing to his rooms after leaving his car at this garage : “ Very good indeed. Just what I want, in fact.” He tried to arrange for a sitting-room which should over-

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look the garage, failed of this but secured a bedroom with a garage view, and smiling contentedly, went out to view the beach.

This, too, was just what he wanted. He prowled up and down amid—as *he* said; I should have taken a different view—the crowd, the noise and the mess of a typical English fore-shore, observing the ice-cream carts and the oyster stalls with a sardonic eye, and occasionally retiring behind a bathing van to make a quiet note or two in an old red pocket book. (For Peregrine was not a *poseur*, you know; at least, not much of one; he did not *want* people to know he was a writer). The sticky children who grew red in the face with quarrelling over a spade, the grandmamas who enjoyed their oysters in uncomely fashion, the husbands who had come out of the bar perhaps hardly soon enough—Peregrine saw them all; and he noticed with especial glee the silly antics of the screaming, giggling bathers. Yes, upon the whole he was very well satisfied with Ignotus-on-Sea; it was delightfully inferior. And then, suddenly, he discovered its crowning imbecility—the circus.

At first he did not know what it was when, in a rather deserted corner of the shore, he came upon a score or so of empty deck-chairs arranged in a circle round some small wooden objects like inverted plantpots. What on earth is all this, thought Peregrine, looking about him; and seeing no answer to his question, after a little hesitation drew back one of the rickety chairs, and sat down. Immediately there appeared from behind a nearby van a painted old hag.

I winced.

“Well, she *was* a painted old hag,” Peregrine defended himself. “Blowsy and crumpled, with untidy peroxide hair, clad in a dirty mauve dress which was much too tight for her.”

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“Peregrine, I don’t want to hear all these horrors : ” I cried.

“ You must,” said Peregrine, setting his jaw grimly, “ or you won’t see the point of the story. Besides, what’s the use of pretending such people don’t exist ? They *do*.”

I sighed. “ Go on,” I said resignedly.

The hag, wreathing her painted face into smiles in Peregrine’s direction, clapped her hands so that her bracelets jingled, and out came two dirty little ragamuffins in tattered finery, with torn red sashes round their waists, and began to turn somersaults, walk about the tumbled sand on their hands, and perform other such unsophisticated gymnastics. They were boy and girl, about thirteen or so, said Peregrine ; they looked hungry and unhappy, and had no personal attractions that he could see. Peregrine was still in the dark as to the nature of the entertainment when the hag enlightened him by leading into the circle an old white horse. “ Oh ! ” thought Peregrine : “ I see. This is a circus, and here the ring ; I am the spectator and that horse a circus horse.” The horse was so much too large for the ring that when, under the hag’s direction, it galloped round, dodging the plant-pots in the traditional style, it seemed to be waltzing. It was soon blown, and stood still, its old sides heaving. The hag then, speaking to it in a vicious undertone, urged it to do some trick with its forelegs ; it did not move, so she struck its knees slightly with a switch she carried. Now it pawed one old hoof slowly up and down ; the hag took the opportunity to ask it, quickly, questions of an arithmetical kind. The horse informed Peregrine that one and one are two, and two and two four, and then retired gratefully to its shade behind the van. The children re-emerged, and did a dance, the feebleness of which had to be seen to be believed, said Peregrine. Then came the *piece de resistance*, the star

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turn of the affair. The hag tripped into the ring followed by five small dogs. There was an old white terrier, short-sighted but sagacious ; a smooth black dog in a red coat, a brown "pom" with a huge green bow, and two young white mongrel dogs of a terrier-ish breed, who careered about, upset the other dogs, declined to walk on their hind legs or jumps sticks or remain perched on their boxes or do anything that the hag wished them to do—which, said Peregrine, vexed her greatly, so that she screamed at them and struck at them with her switch. Peregrine now found the she-child beside him, proffering a filthy cap ; he put in a coin and walked away, feeling that his new novel was going to be splendid.

"Was that all you felt ?" I enquired.

Peregrine gave me a quick glance. "Oh no," he said airily. "I thought also that this unpleasing, this repulsive *ensemble* was what circus life really is. I thought I should like to show the people who write novels about circus life, all footlights and romance and glamour, this particular circus. 'Quaint poesy, and real romance of war' you know."

"I know," I said. But—"

"Also," continued Peregrine : "I felt confirmed in my view of the innate repulsiveness of human life."

"Did you indeed ?" I said.

"Yes," said Peregrine firmly. "I did."

And he continued to feel thus confirmed for several days, during which the novel progressed simply admirably. He got up late, while he dressed observed the garage proprietor's horrid rages, then worked hard most of the day ; in the evening he went down to the shore, and having watched a performance of the circus, returned to his rooms and wrote most of the night. His two stimuli never failed him ; they

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roused him to hate and scorn of the human race twice a day as punctually as clockwork. And then one day—

“ Well ? ” I said.

Peregrine shuffled his feet about.

“ Come, no shirking,” said I.

Well ! It appeared that one afternoon the divine infatustus kept him working beyond the appointed hour, and by the time he reached the shore the circus was slowly leaving it. He was feeling rather stale and very much in need of stimulation, and the thought of having to do without the circus provoked him. So much did it provoke him, apparently, that he presently found himself following the wretched little cortège along the streets. The hag led the horse, upon which were loaded the little wooden stands and the old white dog ; the children trailed miserably behind, the other four dogs sometimes getting lost and having to be summoned shrilly, sometimes yapping at their heels. The horse hung its head in the immensity of its fatigue, the hag jerked at its bridle. Repulsive, thoroughly repulsive, thought Peregrine ; the novel will be good to-night.

And then, all of a sudden he found himself entering his own back street, the street he looked on as he dressed, the garage street. He could hardly believe his eyes at first, but with each step he grew surer, until at last he actually stood before the open garage gates, watching the circus trail across the yard. The hag, the children, the horse and the five dogs all vanished into the ramshackle stable at the far end, while Peregrine stared. In a moment the children came flying out together, then the hag followed slowly ; the animals were evidently to stay within.

When the hag, muttering to herself and shaking her penny bracelets, had passed Peregrine and vanished, limping, down the road, Peregrine approached the garage proprietor and

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awaited his attention. Presently the man finished the shouting match in which he was engaged, turned, thrust his red face angrily into Peregrine's, and slobbered :

“ What *d'you* want ? ”

“ I just wished to enquire,” began Peregrine in his most precious tones : “ Whether the lady with the circus horse is a relative of yours or no ? ”

At this the garage proprietor lost his never very secure temper. He shouted profane remarks at Peregrine, and showed an inclination to stamp upon his toes.

“ I gather,” said Peregrine when he had finished : “ that the answer is in the negative.”

“ You're right there,” said the man feelingly. “ Now what *d'you* want ? *D'you* want your car ? ”

“ How much does she pay you a week for the stabling ? ” demanded Peregrine.

“ What *d'you* want to know for ? ” said the proprietor suspiciously.

“ Well, I just——” began Peregrine.

“ She pays nowt, if you want to know,” burst out the man loudly, evidently unable to suppress a long-standing grievance any longer. “ Nowt. And there they are taking up the stable, and eating their heads off in corn and dog-biscuit, and barking and yapping and what-not fit to break your head open, all for nowt. She's stranded, that's what she is, and likely to go on being stranded as far as I can see. She hasn't paid me a penny for six weeks, damn her ! Not a penny ! So now you know.” He turned away with an angry snort.

“ Why don't you turn the animals out, then ? ” demanded Peregrine smoothly.

The garage proprietor swung round and stared at Peregrine, while his red swollen face grew slowly purple. “ Look here ! ” he shouted suddenly. “ You be off, you damned

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young whippersnapper! Who the hell asked you to come round here, I'd like to know, poking your silly beard into things as don't concern you? Turn them animals out! Why, what'd she do with them? And those homeless kids she's trying to keep! Well, I'm damned! See here! You take your car and be off!"

"Well?" I said, as Peregrine said no more.

"Well!" he said with a queer look. "You're a very penetrating critic, aren't you?"

"Sometimes," said I.

"Pray don't imagine," protested Peregrine earnestly, "that since that little episode I'm inclined to take a *romantic* view of life. I still don't like tousled peroxide hair and tight mauve dresses and dirt, I don't like beastly little circuses with wretched animals, I loathe men who shout and cheat; and when those things are there I can't help seeing them. But now I can see something else as well. . . ."

"You may see Parnassus some day," I murmured.

"Oh, don't let's get romantic about it," scoffed Peregrine.



JULES ROMAINS

Quinette's crime¹

[Continued from our November Issue]

WHEN midday came, Quinette left his shop, doing his best to look as natural as possible. He had found it very hard to wait so long.

He locked the street door of the shop and the kitchen door into the courtyard carefully, but quickly enough not to attract attention. It was true that sometimes, about once a week, he absented himself from noon until half past one and went to lunch at a little restaurant near by, instead of taking a hastily prepared meal in his kitchen. But he did not want anybody to notice that there was anything out of the way about his movements to-day.

He sniffed the air of the street. He studied it like a face in which one expects to surprise some hidden emotion. A few passers-by were walking along the pavements. Quite a number of windows were open, especially on the side of the tall houses, which at this hour of the day had the sun on them. Two or three women were looking out of their windows.

¹ From *Men of Good Will* by Jules Romains. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. (Lovat Dickson, Large Crown 8vo., 8s. 6d. net).

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Would there be so many windows open on an ordinary day? Were these women looking out entirely by chance? Or, if they seemed to be watching for something, was it merely their husbands' return?

The passers-by certainly seemed to be walking in the ordinary way. And yet their walk, their presence at different distances, conveyed to Quinette an impression almost of mystery. Even the number of them led him to ask himself a question: "Aren't there more of them than on any other day at this hour?"

He looked at the row of low houses, on the right-hand side of the street. "Was it in one of those houses?" Then he looked at the tall grey houses opposite. "It would have been harder for him to get out of them. Besides, you can hear everything. . . . But there are isolated rooms . . . next to a thick wall . . . or over an empty apartment. . . . And then, in certain circumstances, it might have been done quietly. . . ."

He realised that he was walking along the street himself in a rather unusual way, with hesitating steps, with his head too often raised and questioning, as though he were in this neighbourhood for the first time and were trying to discover a landmark.

He found himself opposite a little grocer's shop.

"I must go in there. I'll buy something or other . . . a box of matches. I'll listen to what the people are saying . . . Yes, but suppose they're talking about *that*—shall I have sufficient self-control not to give myself away? . . . Haven't I presence of mind enough as a rule? I had plenty this morning, when I found him in front of me all at once. . . . Yes, but I might flush or turn pale. . . . If I do, I must enter into the conversation, give my opinion, talk about all the crimes there are, blame the police. I could say:

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‘ When you live alone, as I do, it’s alarming ! ’ . . . Surely you have a right to be upset when you hear that there has just been a murder right beside you ? ’

A murder ? Of course. What else could it have been ?

He crossed the street. He went into the grocer’s. There were the proprietor, his assistant, a couple of women customers, and a boy. “ Anything else ? . . . a litre of petrol . . . ” “ Would you like them in a box or by the pound ? ” . . . “ Maurice, hand me those ninety-five-centimes sponges.”

The bookbinder waited, with his ears pricked up, imagining, after every pause, that somebody would say : “ By the way, did you hear ? . . . ” His heart was thumping. He was surprised at it. He even asked himself whether his heart had ever thumped like that before. When he was very angry, perhaps. Quinette, who as a rule was one of the calmest of men, had in the course of his life, at intervals of a few years, been very angry indeed.

Finally his turn came. They gave him his matches. He paled a little when the shopkeeper looked at him as he said : “ And what else ? . . . ” He had to get out. He went out disappointed, almost humiliated. He said to himself that he was not going to repeat the experiment, that he would go straight home and shut himself up even more completely than usual.

But he had not taken a dozen steps along the pavement before he was seized once more by a burning curiosity. The deed—he avoided calling it “ the crime ” ; he avoided classifying it and thereby condemning it—the deed had taken place here, in this very locality ; quite close, probably. It was not enough to say that it had taken place. No, it was still there, like something present. Still invisible, perhaps ;

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hidden at a certain depth. Where was it? Behind which of these walls?

But it could not remain hidden for ever. It was bound to come out in the end. Where would it come out from? On which of these house-fronts would it make its appearance, like a bloody sweat?

Quinette felt like going into one of these houses and saying to the concierge who was sweeping out the hall: "Madame . . . madame . . . didn't you notice anything out of the way this morning? . . . No? Are you sure? No unusual noises? Nobody called out? There doesn't happen to be an old woman in the house who lives alone, in an apartment looking out on the courtyard? Oh, you saw her coming down this morning, did you? You didn't hear anybody running past your door?"

He was opposite a fruit-shop. He could hear voices raised. What were these people talking about? Was it here that the "deed" had just emerged out of the shadows?

"What can I buy that doesn't cost much and that you can stick in your pocket easily? Yes, a couple of sous' worth of mixed herbs."

The first sentence he heard as he entered gave him a shock:

"When I picked him up, he was still breathing."

Quinette had to lean against a big round basket full of vegetables. A few moments earlier he had been equally afraid of flushing and of turning pale. He realised that turning pale was what he had to fear. But he was still able to speak. He was quite capable of saying, in an almost natural tone of voice: "Excuse me, but . . ." He still had his presence of mind.

A moment later he was calm — calm and rather disappointed. These people were talking about an injured

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sparrow, which a good woman had found in a courtyard and which had died almost immediately. They were discussing at length how the sparrow might have been hurt. "A cat on the eaves." "A boy with a sling."

"And all this fuss," Quinette reflected, "because a sparrow has been killed in the neighbourhood! If they only knew! . . ."

He toyed for a moment with the effect which he would create among the company present if he suddenly started calmly telling them what had happened to him that morning. He imagined how they would stare, how they would exclaim. The story of the sparrow would not be worth much. But if this idea excited him, it did not impel him to speak. The secret of which he was full exerted no pressure to break out of him. He had always flattered himself that he was no gabbler. But this little test made him sure of it. Clearly, the necessity of unburdening himself was not one of his weaknesses.

When he had his couple of sous' worth of mixed herbs, he had to retire from the fruit-shop. Where should he go next? The tobacconist's on the corner? He would only have to buy another box of matches.

But he was beginning to find one particular source of anxiety uppermost in his mind. He felt that the stranger's deed was evading him. Might it not evade him indefinitely? Were there not deeds of this kind which remained permanently unknown? The man had certainly promised to meet him this evening, in the rue Saint-Antoine. But was Quinette simple-minded enough to count on that?

He tried to make exact suppositions, to reason closely.

"What could it have been? Something not so very serious, which did not attract the attention of the neighbours and about which the victim, for some reason or other,

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did not inform the police? Still, the man seemed very much upset. Of course, there are fellows who lose their heads and think themselves lost over next to nothing. Yes, but what about the smears of blood on the door-knob, the stains of blood on his hands, on his clothes? And his handkerchief? There's no doubt that blood flowed—plenty of blood."

Quinette kept coming back to the same picture: a little apartment looking out on a courtyard, on an upper floor. Silence all around; an almost empty house. (The other tenants were out at their work.) An old woman living alone in squalor, with her small savings. A canary in a cage. The man kills the old woman, or leaves her for dead. He strips her. He ransacks the furniture, the mattress, and makes his escape with a fairly large amount of money. (As a matter of fact, he offered Quinette money.)

The man was not a professional crook. He was too distraught. But would he come to the meeting-place that evening? Had he a strong enough reason for coming? Yes, the fear of being denounced to the police, with a very exact description of himself. But his fear of showing himself in public might prove stronger, not to speak of his distrust of Quinette, whose attitude must have seemed inexplicable to him.

"If he thinks he has found a safe hiding-place, he will stay lurking in it like a wild beast—even if he has a vague idea that it will be worth his while to meet me. In that case, he must have an animal instinct which dominates all his reasoning.

"What ought I to do if he doesn't come?"

Quinette faced frankly all the risks he would run if he revealed that morning's adventure to the police, too belatedly. His part in the affair would strike them as sus-

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picious. Besides, he would be exposing himself to the possibility of revenge.

He imagined himself approaching the police.

“ Inspector . . . I have something to report to you. . . .” He would assume his most dignified air as a respectable craftsman and tradesman. “ A curious thing happened to me at home this morning. . . .” He would describe the scene in his shop, the man’s distress, the bloodstains. “ He told me that he had hurt himself. I certainly thought it rather suspicious. But I couldn’t very well make a fuss, could I? I looked out into the street. Not a policeman to be seen. If I called for help, and if he was a criminal, he would have plenty of time to kill me. So I pretended to believe him. As he wanted to thank me, I suggested to him that we should have an *apéritif* together this evening, giving him to understand clearly that, if he did not come, I should consider myself entitled to regard his conduct as most unusual and disclose it as I thought fit. . . . Meanwhile, I was registering his appearance in my mind.”

The inspector might say, at the most :

“ You would have done better to come and see me at once.”

But Quinette would reply :

“ I should certainly have come if I had heard any talk about a crime in the neighbourhood. I even took the trouble to make inquiries, discreetly of course, as soon as I could leave my shop. I took steps, inspector, to carry out a regular investigation in the locality.”

He would add, emphasising still more his quality as a person of education :

“ You understand, inspector, that I had scruples about causing annoyance to a man who might very well have been telling me the truth. Besides, it is none of my business to act as an informer.”

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Quinette went into the *café* where they sold tobacco. The proprietor knew him slightly. Quinette took advantage of the fact to say, in the calmest possible tone of voice :

“ I heard somebody saying just now that there had been a burglary in the neighbourhood. This morning or last night. Did you hear anything about it ? ”

“ No.”

“ It was some people going past my shop who said so ; or perhaps I misunderstood them.”

Quinette picked up his box of matches and took his leave. As he went down the two steps that led up to the door of the *café*, he felt the strap of his *Herculex* pinch the flesh of his thigh again. But this little irritation was beginning to become familiar to him ; it even had a certain charm. It had the merit of recalling his attention to the vivifying electric current which his adventure had made him forget, but whose subtle encouragement he needed to feel, perhaps, more than ever.

* * *

Ever since four o’clock Quinette had been continually tempted to walk down to the nearest corner and buy an evening paper. But he resisted this temptation ; both because he did not like to leave his shop, and because he did not want to do anything which might strike his neighbours as being in the least out of the way ; and also, perhaps, by way of schooling his impatience.

His preparations for going out took a little longer than he had expected. He devoted unusual care to them. Never had he been so particular about seeing that he was all in order, not forgetting his electric belt ; that everything was in its right place in his various pockets ; that his shop was properly closed up and locked up.

It was twelve minutes past five before he was out in the

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street. (His watch was always regulated with extreme exactitude. He even went so far as to adjust his minute-hand into accordance with the second-hand.)

"Here I am, late already," he said to himself. "Stupid of me. Still, whether I'm late or not . . ."

When he reached the Métro station, he bought a paper; but he did not open it until he was in the train. A hasty, preliminary glance at it did not disclose what he was looking for. He looked over the paper again more slowly. Nothing on the front page. It was true that the political news took up nearly the whole of it. Nothing in the last-minute news. He scanned the rest of the paper, column by column. There was no important local news. A train in collision at Corbeil. A few accidents. A suicide. Two burglaries—but without violence—one in the eighth district, the other in the boulevard Pereire. However hard you tried, it was impossible to connect them with the stranger's visit. In the rue de Rivoli a dangerous escaped convict had been arrested. He was thirty-three. That would be about his visitor's age. But there was nothing about the escaped convict's having committed any crime whatever that very morning.

Quinette folded the paper up again. He was disappointed. But he had read this local news, trivial as it was, with quite a novel interest. In the matter of the arrest of the runaway, and in that of the two burglaries, he had adopted, without noticing it, a point of view unusual to him. He had said to himself: "What a silly idea, going and walking in the rue de Rivoli, in broad daylight, when the police are after you!" Then: "So apparently descriptions are worth something after all." Then: "Is it true, as people say, that criminals are scarcely ever found by the police themselves—that they are given away by informers, especially women? So, if they were more careful—above all, about having anything to

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do with women—they would never be caught, would they ? ”

He came back to the main problem.

“ When did the ‘ deed ’ take place ? This very morning, unquestionably ; and a very short time before he burst into my shop. Say, a quarter of an hour before. . . . No, I’m wrong there. He left the spot a quarter of an hour before ; but the ‘ deed ’ may have taken place much earlier. He may have spent some time with his victim. To rob her, if it was a case of robbery. To await a favourable moment for getting away. Or to get rid of certain clues. . . . Not very likely, that ; for his first step would be to clean himself up.

“ Anyway, that’s not the question. He came to my place about half-past nine. I must have been the first person who knew, or suspected, that something had happened. Yet at noon, when I made my little round, the neighbourhood had heard nothing at all. Nor had the police, either, almost certainly. Otherwise there would have been police turning up, and the examining magistrate ; inquiries and all the rest of it ; a stir in the streets. So it’s quite natural that the papers, which go to press probably about one o’clock, or two o’clock, should say nothing about it.”

The silence of the Press was no disproof, so far, of the reality of the “ deed.” This reasoning comforted Quinette, who had been on the point of feeling rather bitter about things.

But then he had to deal with another unpleasant idea.

“ He won’t be at the rendezvous. In fact, I must have been a fool to imagine for a moment that he would be there.”

He went over the scenario of his visit to the police inspector again and made improvements in it. He succeeded in polishing up his little speech. And what about the description ? He must have that prepared, too, if only to

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show the police that he was a man with a sense of responsibility, who might take his time before making a move of that kind, but at least, when he had made up his mind, did not worry people to no purpose.

“ This fellow, inspector, struck me as being about thirty to thirty-five. He was of medium height—that is, about my own height. Build?—oh, quite ordinary—neither fat nor thin. The colour of his hair—— Be careful, now! I was thinking of saying ‘ quite ordinary ’ again. That wouldn’t sound as though I were serious. Can I still see his face before me? Yes, in the sense that I should recognise it. But how is one to describe it? Had he a moustache? Yes, I think so. I wouldn’t swear to it; but I think so. Not much of a one, in any case. His eyes? I didn’t notice their colour. Perhaps I haven’t much of a gift of observation. Besides, after all, I was upset. The police, I suppose, must have a method of their own when they look at anybody. A kind of questionnaire in their own minds; and they put down every reply in its right place.

“ Still, when I told him that I should not have much difficulty about giving a description of him, ‘ which would not be far wrong,’ I remember noticing two or three things. Yes, a kind of pouch under the eyes, a hollow running some little way down, and rather bluish. Yes, his skin was fine. And of course I can see his moustache, now I think of it—on the fair side, and a little, just a little, straggling, without much hair in it. His hair certainly wasn’t fair—not as light as his moustache. Brown, let’s say. Oh, and I also noticed a cleft right at the point of his chin—almost like a gimlet hole. He needed a shave, of course.

“ In any case, it wasn’t so much the details that struck me. Whereas the kind of face he had, the way he looked at me, even the tone of his voice—I have all that perfectly fixed in

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my mind. But how can you convey that? You would have to be at one and the same time an artist, a writer, and even an actor. Still, the essential thing is for me to give the police inspector an impression of good faith and good will."

He imagined the inspector listening intently, nodding his head, taking notes, and little by little conceiving a respect for the bookbinder, for his perfect elocution, for the evident sincerity of his statements, and for the clarity, sense of proportion, and carefulness with which he made them.

The bookbinder, who refused to be browbeaten by public opinion, was, on the other hand, very appreciative of such marks of consideration as he received from distinguished people, and especially from people in positions of authority. He was pleased enough if a police-sergeant or a customs officer spoke to him with a special shade of politeness; but the higher the man's position in the hierarchy, the keener was his pleasure.

As he thought things over, he had several times looked at his watch. When he reached the Bastille, it was already 5.49. Might it not be better if he went the rest of the way on foot? He ran the risk of losing several minutes in changing trains. But, without quite being able to explain why, Quinette found it preferable to avoid a long walk down the rue Saint-Antoine which might make him conspicuous. He emerged from under the ground at the Saint-Paul station, quite close to the rendezvous. While he was waiting for the train, he had verified the position of the rue Malher and the rue de Turenne on the map.

The Saint-Paul station clock pointed to 5.55. Five minutes late. Suppose the man had come, though reluctantly, and had taken advantage of Quinette's being a little late to consider himself absolved from his promise? Quinette, who was a punctual man, reproached himself.

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The rue Malher was directly opposite the station. The rue de Turenne ought to be the third turning to the right. Quinette started walking slowly along the north pavement towards it.

Darkness had almost completely fallen. In the distance, in the direction of the Hôtel de Ville, there was still a bluish patch in the sky. The lights in the windows of the shops, which were plentiful and all close together in this district, lit up the pavement brightly, though slantwise, and with contrasting, capricious shadows which made the passers-by less easy to scrutinise than you would have thought at first sight.

Quinette reached the corner of the rue de Turenne without seeing his man. He paused for a moment, peering along the street. A few shadows flitted from lamp-post to lamp-post. He went back on his tracks.

Could his attention have wandered for an instant? Suddenly, a couple of yards in front of him and to the right, he saw a man walking along with a parcel under his arm. It was his visitor of that morning.

"He's even brought the parcel. Just as I told him. It's extraordinary."

The man half-turned round, glanced at Quinette, and, with an almost imperceptible movement of his shoulder, signalled to him to keep on following him.

He turned down the first street to the right, which was very short. He crossed over to the other side. From time to time he glanced back, beyond Quinette, as though to make sure that nobody was following the two of them.

They reached a building which proved to be a covered market. The man, turning to the left, walked all round it. Its front presented rather strange ornamentation. A lamp lit up the head of a bull, clumsily sculptured. You might

have thought yourself on the threshold of the temple of some barbaric religion.

After two more turns, they found themselves in a very narrow street, some fifty yards long, which was absolutely deserted. The man stopped, but, with a gesture of his hand, indicated that Quinette was not to join him yet.

“Evidently he’s suspicious. He wants to make sure that I have not brought the police with me.”

Their zigzag walk recommenced. They reached the Place des Vosges. The man walked almost the whole way round it, keeping under the arcades. The square was empty. One could have heard a footstep, even in the distance.

“He’s certainly giving me some exercise. I wonder whether he’s making a fool of me,” Quinette said to himself. But, on the other hand, he participated eagerly in his companion’s anxiety. “After all, he has reason to be suspicious ; and what he’s doing is not so silly as it looks. Suppose I had come for the purpose of handing him over to the police, and that they were dogging our footsteps, waiting their opportunity to arrest him. Well, I don’t see how they could manage to dog us round this square, where you can hear every sound, without giving themselves away.”

Quinette was following four or five paces behind. Suddenly the man threw at him, in a hollow voice :

“Not so close !”

A little farther on, he repeated, almost in exasperation :

“Not so close, I tell you !”

Quinette dropped back until there were a dozen yards between them. Henceforth he had to pay more attention as he followed. The man might disappear round a corner, or dive suddenly into a doorway. Quinette’s anxiety prevented him from continuing to notice the names of the streets. The

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stranger made several more turns and for a moment appeared to have lost his way. (But perhaps, in pretending to hesitate, in going back on his tracks, he was only aiming once more at making sure that Quinette was the only man walking behind him.)

Finally he stopped in front of a shop, narrow and old, which looked like a wine-shop. An ancient grating of wrought iron protected the shop-front. Through thick curtains a faint light came from inside.

"In here," he said.

It was difficult to guess whether he had chosen this place in advance or had decided upon it all at once.

The room ran far back. A partial partition, glass at the top, divided it into two. In the front part several men, oddly dressed, in a way at once poverty-stricken and respectable, which made them look like retired clerks who had come down in the world, were sitting around a big table covered with ancient oilcloth.

Quinette followed the stranger into the back part of the room. The proprietor, standing on a cane-bottomed chair, lit a gas lamp.

"Give us—I don't know—— What do you want to drink at this time of day? They haven't got much. I'm going to have a quetsch. They've got some good stuff."

"I don't mind—I'll have the same," said the bookbinder.

He studied his companion furtively. He wanted to verify the description which he had built up out of memory in the Métro.

"Yes, there's the cleft in his chin. His moustache is bushier and darker than I thought. Why, he's got a big wart on his left cheek! I ought to have noticed that. He's had a shave since this morning. His eyes are grey. His

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nose is round at the end, and rather snub. He uses hair-oil. Perhaps he hadn't any on this morning. His hair grows straight across his forehead. His ears are rather prominent. . . . Is he wearing the same clothes? They look newer to me."

"What are you looking at me like that for?" asked the other.

"Oh, nothing—I mean to say—you remind me of somebody I know well. But I can't think who it is. You know that kind of impression one has."

There was a silence. The man had a wary air about him, but he was by no means dejected.

"I've brought you here because it's quiet, you see? These people are Yids; they only just understand French. In any case, there's no risk of meeting a 'tec here. . . . He'd be spotted as soon as he came in. . . . You're not a Jew, are you?"

"No."

"I asked you because you wear a beard. But, of course, that's no reason."

There was another silence.

"Tell me—why were you so anxious to see me again?"

"I told you."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did."

"I thought that perhaps you wanted to give me away."

"Oh! . . ."

". . . Not that I imagined you belonged to the police yourself. Of course not. But there are so many people who, though they don't belong to them, are in touch with them. I very nearly didn't come."

"Still, you have come."

"I'd promised."

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They sipped their quetsch. The man went on, in a very low voice :

“ In any case, you can’t give me away any more now.”

“ Oh, and why not? Bear in mind that I don’t want to in the least. But why not? ”

“ That’s quite easy to grasp. You would be an accessory.”

“ What do you mean? ”

“ Look here. You let me into your place this morning. If one tried hard enough, one could certainly find somebody who saw me going in or coming out. And now we’re meeting here. Suppose I’m arrested to-night or to-morrow? What’s to stop me from telling the police that we fixed this business up between us? A fifty-fifty split. Or even that we shared up here, this evening? These Yids would bear me out.”

“ But——” said Quinette, rather taken aback; “ you must admit that you might be arrested without my having anything to do with it. You wouldn’t be so mean as to denounce me for nothing? ”

The other sneered.

“ What proof am I going to have that you’d nothing to do with it? ”

“ It would be a dirty trick . . . a breach of faith . . . ”

“ You don’t want to run any risk, eh? ”

“ I’m running quite enough risk as it is. And what am I getting out of it? ”

“ I offered you money.”

“ And did I want to take your money? No, I didn’t. You’ve no right to say things that aren’t true. . . . And to think that I was simply trying to do you a good turn! ”

“ Well, that’s reassuring to me,” the man resumed. “ If you had anything whatever to do with them, directly or

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indirectly, you wouldn't be so much afraid of being given away."

Quinette asked himself whether he had not rather overdone it—whether the other was not ceasing a little too much to be afraid of him. He ought to have gone more skilfully about graduating the doses of gaining his confidence and intimidating him, without letting either process spoil the effect of the other.

"You're making a mistake," he said. "It wasn't fear that made me speak like that. Go ahead and denounce me if you like. I don't mind. You may be sure of that. But you make me sick with your threats."

"My threats!—my threats! . . . You threatened me enough this morning, if I didn't come."

"Listen to me. I am a man of my word. If I give you my word that I won't denounce you, I might 'belong to the police,' as you put it, a hundred times over, and still I wouldn't denounce you. On the contrary, I would help you to get away from them. See?"

The stranger stared at him, rather puzzled.

Quinette went on :

"Put it like this : Somebody who belonged to the police, even to the higher ranks of the police, might have a bee in his bonnet. An unfortunate fellow, who has just done something silly, falls into his hands. Instead of seizing him, he protects him. But in return he requires complete trust. That's natural. I'm just imagining a case to help you to grasp my meaning."

The other wrinkled his forehead and tried to see it.

"You needn't rack your brains. I'm just telling you to trust me, and you won't regret it."

"There's something that I still don't understand."

"What is it?"

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"What we are doing here this evening."

"What are we doing here? Well, I'm expecting you to tell me everything that happened to you before you came to my place this morning. Everything—you understand?"

Quinette had adopted an authoritative tone. He looked the other straight in the eyes. He tried to bring into play that invisible energy which he was sure his organism had recently been producing in unusual quantity.

The other answered him smoothly.

"You're as curious as all that, are you? Well, why don't you look in the papers, as you told me this morning? It ought to be there."

"It's not there yet."

"Are you quite sure?"

He said these last words with an ambiguous air of mockery which disturbed Quinette.

"Perhaps I didn't look in the right place," he said to himself. "Or I may have bought the wrong paper. Or I may have read something without realising that it applied to him. But still, I don't think so."

This short pause sufficed to make Quinette lose the advantage which he had gained, and the moral hold which he had over the man.

He pulled the paper he had bought out of his pocket and thrust it at him.

"If it's there, show it to me."

The man stopped smiling when he saw the paper. His face clouded and even seemed to become anxious.

"All right, all right," he said, pushing the paper away.

Then he frowned, and spoke almost rudely.

"There's no sense in this. I didn't mind coming this evening, because you insisted, and because you had done me a service. But this is enough of it. I've brought you back

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your books. I haven't even opened the package. And now leave me alone. I've other things to do, you know. I'll say good-bye, with my best thanks, and there's an end of it."

On the other side of the partition a conversation in Yiddish was in progress. Quinette turned round to make sure that nobody was paying any attention to them, and satisfied himself once more that there was no door or suspicious opening in the back room. Then he spoke in a very low voice.

"Are you quite sure that the victim is dead?"

The man shuddered, stared at Quinette, and then, shrugging his shoulders, leant his cheek against his hand.

The bookbinder went on :

"You don't think that the neighbours may have heard anything?"

"The neighbours? What neighbours?"

Quinette felt the picture which he had in his mind wavering and dissolving—that picture of the little apartment looking out on the courtyard, on the fourth floor. He made an effort to rid himself of any preconceived ideas and let nothing escape him that his man might give away. But how was he going to marshal his own questions, how was he even going to formulate them, without seeing something in his mind—places, actions, people? He clutched at the phrase :

"What neighbours? Exactly. I'm asking you who you think might have overheard, at one time or another."

The man seemed to be repeating the question to himself; then he replied :

"There would have to be some, in the first place, wouldn't there—some neighbours, I mean?"

What did he mean? Quinette saw the "deed" escaping

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from the district where he had confined it, escaping even outside Paris altogether—situating itself in a solitude of fields and trees. But that made the sequel incomprehensible. A man who had committed a crime in the suburbs did not rush into a bookbinder's shop in the Vaugirard district to wash off the blood that stained his hands.

“Come, come !” he said ; “what are you trying to make me think ?”

He emphasised the tone which he had just adopted—the tone of a man who knows more than he says, and asks questions less for the purpose of dragging your secrets from you than for that of verifying his own information or making sure of some point of detail. He added, with the air of a man who throws out a disturbing suggestion :

“Neighbours ? There are always neighbours !”

The other looked at him with increased anxiety. Then, as though by way of reassuring himself, he asked :

“If I knocked this chair over, would the people at the other side of the street hear it ?”

“If this door here, and their own windows, were shut—no, they wouldn't.”

“I mean with everything shut, of course.”

“No, they wouldn't hear anything—but are you sure you didn't make any more noise than that ? . . .”

“I'm just keeping the thing in proportion. I suggested a chair being knocked over because the people across the street are really quite close.”

Quinette turned round and looked towards the street, as though he were comparing the dimensions which he saw with other dimensions that he had in his mind. He closed his right eye, raised his left eyebrow, made a face.

“Yes . . . no doubt. . . . But when you're very intent upon something, you may make more noise than you think,

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or you may, despite yourself, make a noise without noticing it at all. . . . Suppose I asked you, for example : 'Weren't there any shrieks ?'——"

" Shrieks ? "

" Yes, shrieks—you might say, perhaps : ' I can assure you there weren't——'"

" I might say, mightn't I, that I have nothing to tell you ? "

" But suppose that a neighbour, on one side or the other, heard these shrieks, or even waked up with a start——"

" You're giving me the horrors with these ideas of yours."

" Ah, it's more important than you think. . . ."

What Quinette was seeing now was a little house like his own, but even more isolated ; people asleep in the neighbourhood, at dawn ; shrieks, suddenly. . . . With an assurance entirely superficial, he added :

" I repeat : waking up with a start."

" And I say : nothing of the kind."

" Why not ? Because it was so early ? "

" No, not because it was so early. Besides, damn it, you're not going to make me talk if I don't want to ! "

The bookbinder decided that it would be prudent to beat a retreat. In any case, he had carried away a little booty as it was. The picture in his mind was being completed and revised little by little. A little house with no near neighbours, standing in a garden or on waste ground. Somebody all alone. At night, or towards dawn. In any case a time when the people around were asleep. Even so, they might have awakened if there had been much noise. But there had been scarcely any noise. Something knocked over, perhaps. But it was quite likely that the "somebody all alone" had not cried out. She had been killed without making a sound. For there was no doubt that she was dead. Several hours must have elapsed between the "deed" and the man's flight.

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But still, the blood that he had on his hands was quite fresh.
In that case—

Quinette took up the thread again, in a tone of voice which he succeeded in making paternal, soothing.

“ The main thing, from your point of view, is that it wasn’t found out right away. Perhaps they haven’t found out about it even now.”

“ Do you really think so ? ”

The man had said that quite excitedly.

“ You have had several hours to throw them off the scent. That’s something. If you’ve known how to make use of your time— ”

“ Make use of them ? . . . In the first place, do you imagine that one can do just what one likes ? This morning, when I came to your place, I said to myself that I was making a mistake. But what was I to do, dirty and all as I was ? Will you tell me what interest you have in doing all this ? ”

Quinette was well aware that his behaviour must appear suspicious so long as he failed to produce some simple, comprehensive explanation of it. By offering such an explanation he might even find an opportunity of strengthening his prestige.

He whispered :

“ Listen, I’m going to tell you all about it—confidence for confidence. Yes, I used to belong to the police, once ; but I had a frightful row with them. As a matter of fact, I caught one of the chiefs taking bribes. They decided to break me. I had a fine job—not outdoor work, but at headquarters. Naturally, though I hadn’t the experience of an inspector, I picked up quite a number of things, even from the practical point of view—things worth knowing. Well, they played me a dirty trick—one of those dirty tricks you can’t forgive. There you are. I want to hit back at

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them. Whenever I have a chance of keeping anybody out of their claws—so long as he's somebody who interests me, somebody who attracts me, of course—I do it. Now do you understand?"

Apparently the man did. He looked at Quinette quite differently. He glanced for a moment at the parcel, which he had laid on the ground in the corner of the room. He was on the point of saying something, but he changed his mind. He reflected for a moment, and finally he said :

"Of course, if you can help me—but I don't see how you can . . ."

"Certainly I can. We'll see just what I can do for you in a moment. But wait—I can at least tell you now whether you have taken all the precautions you should. Where did you go when you left me this morning?"

The man hesitated.

"Did you go home?"

"No."

"Do you live by yourself?"

"Yes, I have a room at a hotel. As a matter of fact, I owe them my last week's rent."

"You didn't sleep there last night?"

"No—at least, I left there about eleven o'clock."

"They didn't see you go?"

"I dare say they didn't notice."

"But they must have noticed this morning when they cleaned your room?"

"Not necessarily. In the first place, it's a dirty hole, if you must know. Often they don't do the room until noon or later. And besides—"

"You thought of rumpling up your bedclothes?"

"No."

"That was a mistake—a bad mistake," observed Quinette,

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with the air of a man who knew what he was talking about.

"It may have been—but wait a minute. A woman came to see me, yesterday evening. The bed must have been more or less upset."

"A woman? Yesterday, of all days?"

"I wanted to see her again, beforehand. I didn't know what might happen to me."

"Did you talk to her about it?"

"No."

"Quite sure you didn't?"

"No, I didn't. She knew that I was hard up. I told her that I might be going away—that a pal of mine had told me about a job in the suburbs."

"You have a regular profession, have you?"

"I'm a printer."

"Oh, are you? We do much the same kind of work. It's a curious coincidence. Ought to bring us together, oughtn't it?"

"Have you been back to your own neighbourhood?"

The other hesitated.

"... Yes... but only in passing. I ate at a little restaurant where I go sometimes."

"You didn't have a bigger bill than usual?"

"No. I had a bottle of Bordeaux and a couple of brandies. My bill came to somewhere about six francs twenty-five."

"You didn't give any out-of-the-way tip?"

"A franc—one franc twenty-five centimes. I left him the odd change."

The bookbinder sighed.

"It was a silly idea to go back there, when there are thousands of restaurants in Paris where you would have

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been sure to pass unnoticed. But you must have seen people you knew. Didn't you talk to them?"

"No, I didn't."

"You didn't leave anything at your hotel?"

"Yes, a trunk."

"And where are you going to stay to-night?"

The other made no reply. Quinette scrutinised him.

"But didn't you go somewhere to change? Those aren't the clothes you were wearing this morning, are they?"

"Yes, except that I bought a coat."

"And what did you do with your old one?" The man hesitated about replying again. "And you've had a shave and brushed your hair. You didn't do that in the street, did you?"

"I went to a barber's."

"Where—in your own neighbourhood?"

"No, a swell barber's, near the Samaritaine. I'd never been there before."

"But what about your old coat? That's extremely important, you know, because of the stains on it."

"Yes."

"What are you thinking about? You'll have to consider all that. You don't seem to realise the risk you are running. It's the same with your coat."

"Is that all you're worrying about? My clothes aren't going to get me arrested, if nothing else makes me suspected. And if they do arrest me, it will be because they already know I did it. In any case, my goose will be cooked."

"You're reasoning like a child. It surprises me in a printer—a man who must have a certain amount of education."

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"Oh, I haven't got much education. I've been working in quite small places—visiting-cards and announcement-cards mostly. That's even partly why. . . . You lose your job for nothing at all, and then there's all the time you're out of work."

"Well, do you want me to look after you or not?"

Another silence.

"If it's no, I won't hold it against you. You can go to the devil your own way, that's all. Considering how helpless you are, I wouldn't give you two days before you're caught."

The man reflected again; then, picking up the parcel from the floor, he rose to his feet.

"Come along."

"That's my parcel, isn't it? I don't mind carrying it," said the bookbinder. His success made him feel obliging.

"No, no," said the other; and he snatched the parcel out of Quinette's hands.

(To be continued)

Our Contributors

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN has edited for thirteen years an annual collection of *The Best British Short Stories* and for twenty years a similar collection of *The Best American Short Stories*. He has published three books of verse—*White Fountains*, *Distant Music*, and *Hard Sayings*—and among his other books may be mentioned *Son of the Morning* (which is a life of Nietzsche) *The Dance of the Machines*, *The Advance of the American Short Story*, and *The Forgotten Threshold*. He is an American, forty-three years of age, and lives at Oxford.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY was born in the Middle West, but has lived in Europe, chiefly in Paris, for several years. Though much of his work has a European background, he is essentially an American writer, even when most absorbed in the life of the boulevards or the bull-ring. In America particularly he has had a host of imitators of his forceful machine-gun style, and has undoubtedly influenced the craft of the American short story more than any other writer during the last ten years. His best-known books of short stories are *In Our Time* and *Men Without Women*.

HELEN ASHTON is the daughter of one barrister and the wife of another and has lived all her life in London. She is a qualified doctor and has introduced her medical experiences into several of her novels, which usually deal with modern life in a domestic setting. Perhaps the most successful has been *Doctor Serocold*, which was a Book-of-the Month Club choice in America and has been translated into several European languages. It dealt with one day in the life of a country doctor in whose mind is reflected the history of his patients and his town. Her contribution to the present issue is another page from Luke Serocold's day-book. Other novels are *Belinda Grove*, the story of a house, *Bricks and Mortar*, a novel about architecture, and *Mackerel Sky*, a study of modern marriage under difficulties.

H. E. BATES is twenty-eight. His first novel, *The Two Sisters*, was published, with a preface by Edward Garnett, when he was twenty. Since that time he has published three other novels and more than seventy short stories. His work is quieter and more lyrical in tone than that of most of his contemporaries and he is especially devoted to the very short sketch, the prose-poem, a form which has found very little favour in England, though he is almost as fond of the lay-short story, of which *The Waterfall* is an example. His stories are contained in three volumes: *Day's End*, *Seven Tales* and *Alexander and The Black Boxer*, to which will shortly be added a fourth, *The Woman who Had Imagination*, in which the best of his most recent work is included.

HENRY HANDEL RICHARDSON has remained much of a mystery in spite of the sudden and overwhelming success which greeted her trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* when after fifteen years of work she brought it to triumphant conclusion. That nobody could have written *Australia Felix* or *Ultima Thule* (the first and third novels of the trilogy) except an Australian is obvious; and that nobody save a musician could have written *Maurice Guest* (her first novel) is equally clear. In point of fact she is both—the daughter of a Melbourne doctor who came to Leipzig to learn to be a pianist, and to London to write what Gerald Gould has called “one of the indisputably great books of the century.”

SEAN O'FAOLAIN was born in Cork in 1900. He graduated at National University of Ireland. Falling in love with Kathleen in Houlihan, he became for a time Director of Propaganda for the I.R.A. As a result of his experiences he reacted strongly against politics, especially all forms of propaganda. He went to America as Commonwealth Fellow in 1926, and was John Harvard Fellow 1928. In turn he tired of scholarship and teaching. Now, however, he is happily writing about them all. He has published a volume of short stories, *Midsummer Night Madness*, and a novel, *A Nest of Simple Folk*.

MARGARET IRWIN is the author of the historical novel, *Royal Flush*, on the subject of Charles II's youngest sister, Minette, who was married at sixteen to Louis XIV's wicked little brother. History, witchcraft, and ghost stories have always interested her. Her ghostly novel, *Still She Wished for Company*, which combined the eighteenth century with the present day was first published in 1924. But it was

not till she wrote *None so Pretty*, which won the Chatto & Windus historical novel prize of 1930, that she really went "historical." She was at school at Clifton, took English Language and Literature at Oxford, but had her best education in childhood from her uncle, S. T. Irwin, who was classical master at Clifton for thirty-five years. She is married to J. R. Monsell, the artist, and lives in London.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG was born in 1882 and was educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge. He served in France with the 8th Btn. The Middlesex Regt. His best known novels are *The Stepson*, *St. Christopher's Day*, and *Mr. Darby*. He has just published another novel entitled *The Foster Mother*. He is equally well known as a writer of short stories and on the shelves of connoisseurs of this art and on those of collectors of first editions his *Bazaar*, *Sir Pompey*, and *Madame Juno* and other short story volumes find a prominent place. A volume of his Selected Poems was published recently which included his best known poems, *Miss Thompson Goes Shopping*, *Honey Harvest*, and *The Vintage*.

PHYLLIS BENTLEY was born in Halifax, a town in the Pennine uplands of the West Riding of Yorkshire, in 1894, her family on both sides being intimately connected with the woollen textile industry. She was educated at Cheltenham Ladies' College, and in 1914 took her B.A. degree at London University. During the war, Miss Bentley took a man's place as mathematical master in a boys' school. Later, she catalogued several large public libraries in Yorkshire. Miss Bentley has now an established reputation as a novelist, lecturer, and fiction critic. Her best-known novels are *The Spinner of the Years*, *Carr*, and *Inheritance*, all of which have a West Riding scene.

JULES ROMAINS first attracted the attention of discerning critics in this country with his book published in 1914 under the title *Death of a Nobody*. What Proust was to nostalgic day-dreaming pre-War Europe, so Romain is to the awakened, active, adventurous Europe of today. *Men of Good Will*, published this autumn, is steadily gaining him new admirers in this country. In this first volume of what will later be a much larger book, the story of Quinette the Bookbinder and the murder in which he is involved dominates the numerous other themes, some pleasant others unpleasant, which go to make up the life of Paris.

